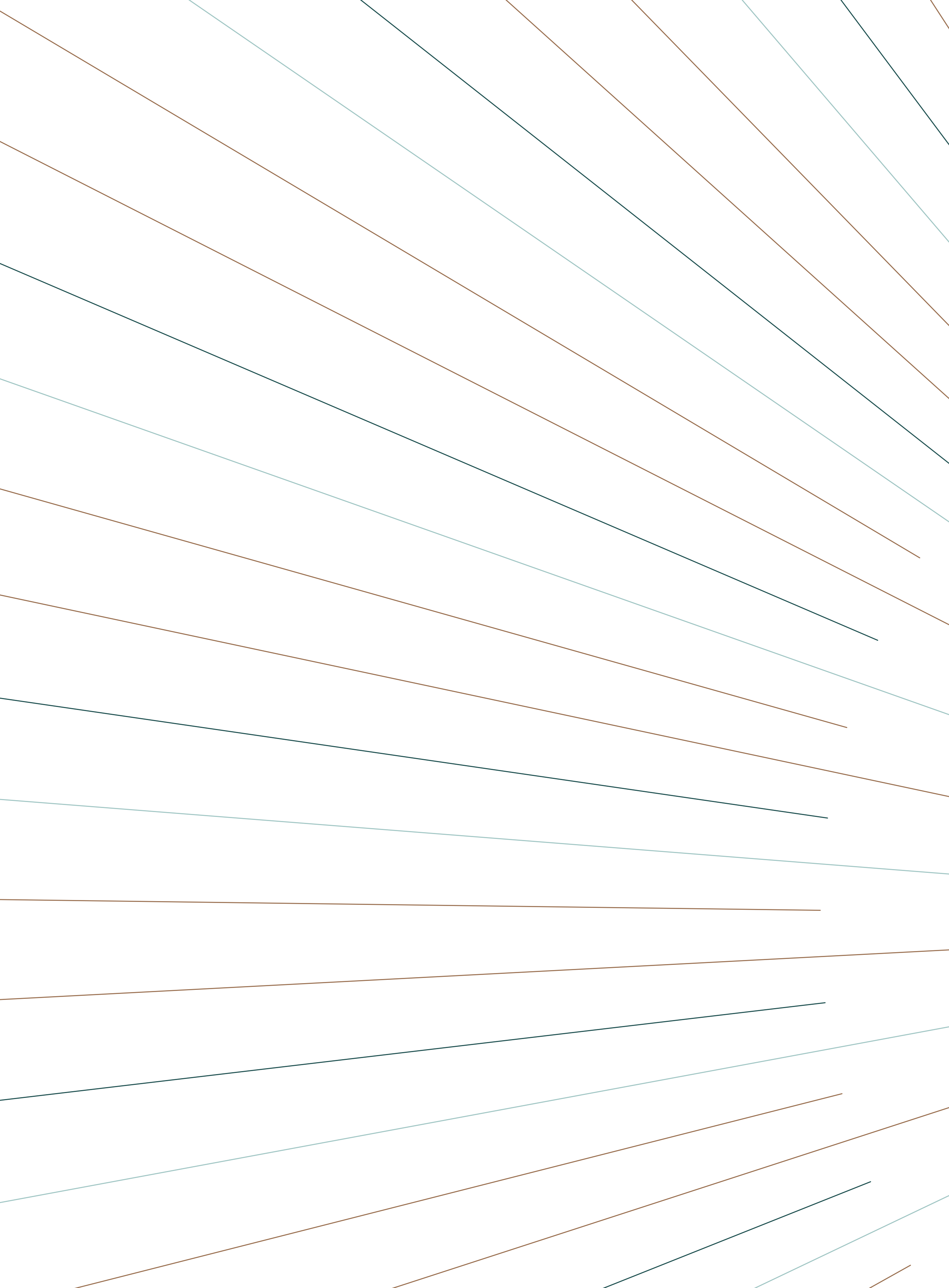
PURE WORSHIP OF
JEHOVAH

RESTORED AT LAST!



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PURE WORSHIP OF
JEHOVAH

RESTORED AT LAST!

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A LETTER FROM THE GOVERNING BODY

Dear Lovers of Jehovah:

The year was 1971. Those who attended the "Divine Name" District Assembly held that year were thrilled to receive several new publications. The publications were described as "just beyond anyone's imagination." Concerning one of those new releases, a brother said: "It's the most exciting preview of things to come that we have ever had!" What was he referring to? It was the book entitled *"The Nations Shall Know That I Am Jehovah" —How?* But why did this book create such excitement? Because it contained updated explanations of the prophecies found in the Bible book of Ezekiel—prophecies that affect the future of all mankind.

In the years since the release of the *'Know Jehovah'* book, the number of God's people has mushroomed—from some 1.5 million to well over 8 million. (Isa. 60:22) These millions of servants of Jehovah collectively speak over 900 different languages. (Zech. 8:23) Many have never had an opportunity to study a book that explains in detail the inspired prophecies recorded by the prophet Ezekiel.

Additionally, in the decades since 1971, our understanding of many Bible truths has been greatly enhanced as the light has continued to grow brighter. (Prov. 4:18) In 1985 we started to see clearly how the "other sheep" are declared righteous as friends of God. (John 10:16; Rom. 5:18; Jas. 2:23) Then in 1995 we understood for the first time that the final judging of "the sheep" and "the goats" would take place during the coming "great tribulation." (Matt. 24:21; 25:31, 32) All these adjustments have had an impact on our understanding of the book of Ezekiel.

In recent years, the light has continued to grow brighter still. Consider the lessons learned from Jesus' illustrations. Many of those lessons have now become crystal clear in our minds and hearts. A number of those illustrations refer to events that will soon take place during the fast-approaching great tribulation. In a similar way, our understanding of certain prophecies found in the book of Ezekiel has been clarified. Included among these are the prophecies concerning Gog of Magog (chapters 38 and 39), the work of the man with the secretary's inkhorn (chapter 9), and the valley of dry bones and the symbolic joining of the two sticks (chapter 37). All these clarifications likewise update what was written years ago in the *'Know Jehovah'* book.

No wonder, then, that many of Jehovah's people have asked, "When will we get a book that provides an updated explanation of Ezekiel's prophecies?" The book *Pure Worship of Jehovah —Restored At Last!* is such a publication. As you read through its 22 chapters and meditate on the beautiful illustrations found therein, you will be amazed at all the careful research that has gone into its preparation. Much prayerful thought was given to ascertaining why Jehovah provided the fascinating Bible book of Ezekiel. Careful consideration was given to such questions as: What lessons were provided in the book of Ezekiel for those who lived in Ezekiel's day as well as for us

“Son of man, look closely, listen carefully,
and pay attention to everything I show you,
for that is why you were brought here.”

EZEKIEL 40:4

today? Which prophecies speak about events that are still in the future? Should we look for any types and antitypes in Ezekiel’s prophecies? The answers to these questions provide the clearest understanding yet of this long-cherished Bible book.

As you read the book of Ezekiel from start to finish, you cannot help but be in awe of the heavenly part of Jehovah’s organization. No doubt you are also amazed at the lofty standards Jehovah has put in place for both those in heaven and those on earth who wish to worship him acceptably. The *Pure Worship* book will help to enhance your appreciation for what Jehovah has already done for his people as well as for what he will do for them in the near future. You will notice that this book emphasizes two themes over and over again. First, in order to please Jehovah, we must know and acknowledge him as the Universal Sovereign. Second, we must worship Jehovah in the way that he approves, bringing our lives into harmony with his lofty standards.

It is our heartfelt desire that this publication will strengthen your resolve to worship Jehovah in a way that honors his great and holy name. At the same time, may it encourage you to keep in expectation of the time when all the nations will have to know that he is Jehovah.—Ezek. 36:23; 38:23.

May our loving Father, Jehovah, richly bless your efforts to understand the book that he inspired the prophet Ezekiel to write.

Your brothers,

Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses

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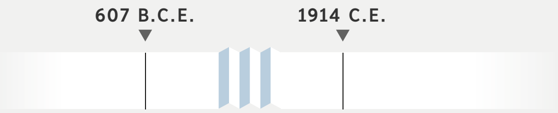
Teaching boxes in this publication are labeled with a chapter number and a sequential letter. For example, the three boxes in Chapter 10 are labeled 10A, 10B, and 10C. In electronic formats, readers have the option to browse all the boxes at once in the “Teaching Boxes” section. Some additional features of this publication are available in electronic formats only.

2B
EZEKIEL
HIS LIFE AND TIMES

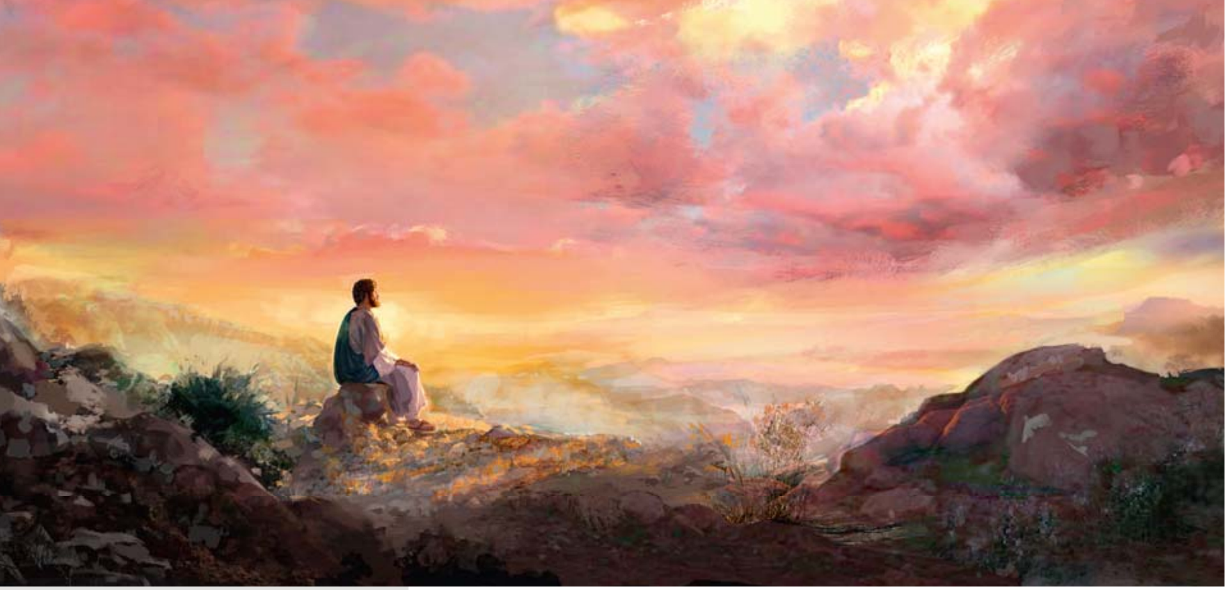
TIME LINES

Many teaching boxes contain time lines. Folds, as shown in the example, indicate that a span of time has been compressed to fit within the artwork. (For an example, see box 8B.) In some cases, these folds indicate an unknown length of time. —See box 9E.



Abbreviations used in this publication:

B.C.E.—before the Common Era
C.E.—Common Era
c.—circa (about)



1

“IT IS JEHOVAH YOUR GOD YOU MUST WORSHIP”

MATTHEW 4:10

FOCUS: *Why pure worship needs to be restored*

1, 2. How does Jesus come to be in the wilderness of Judea in the autumn of 29 C.E., and what happens to him there? (See opening picture.)

3, 4. (a) Satan introduced the first two temptations with what words, and what may he have been trying to get Jesus to doubt? (b) How does Satan use similar tactics today?

IT IS early autumn of 29 C.E., and Jesus is in the wilderness of Judea, just north of the Dead Sea. He was led to this place by holy spirit, following his baptism and anointing. Here, amid a barren landscape of rocks and ravines, Jesus has had 40 days for some quiet time to fast, pray, and meditate. Perhaps during this time, Jehovah has communicated with his Son, preparing him for what lies ahead.

2 Now, when Jesus is weakened by hunger, Satan approaches him. What happens next reveals a vital issue that involves all who love pure worship, including you.

“If You Are a Son of God . . .”

3 **Read Matthew 4:1-7.** Satan introduced the first two temptations with the subtle words, “If you are a son of God.” Did Satan doubt that Jesus is God’s Son? No. That fallen angelic son of God knew full well that Jesus is God’s firstborn Son. (Col. 1:15) Satan no doubt also knew the words Jeho-

vah spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism: "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved." (Matt. 3:17) Perhaps Satan wanted to get Jesus to doubt whether his Father was trustworthy and truly cared about him. With the first temptation—to turn stones into bread—Satan, in effect, asked: 'Since you are God's Son, why does your Father not feed you in this barren wilderness?' With the second temptation—to jump off the battlement of the temple—Satan, in a sense, asked: 'Since you are God's Son, do you really trust your Father to protect you?'

4 Satan uses similar tactics today. (2 Cor. 2:11) The Tempter waits until true worshippers are weakened or discouraged, and then he attacks, often in subtle ways. (2 Cor. 11:14) He tries to deceive us into believing that Jehovah could never love us or approve of us. The Tempter also tries to get us to believe that Jehovah is not trustworthy, that he will not do as he has promised in his Word. But those are vicious lies. (John 8:44) How can we reject them?

5 Consider how Jesus responded to the first two temptations. He had no doubt about his Father's love for him, and he put absolute trust in his Father. Without hesitation, Jesus rejected Satan by quoting his Father's inspired Word. Fittingly, Jesus quoted scriptures that contain the divine name, Jehovah. (Deut. 6:16; 8:3) What better way for God's Son to show that he trusted in his Father than to use His name—the unique name that stands as a guarantee that Jehovah will fulfill all his promises?[1]

6 We can resist Satan's subtle attacks by drawing on Jehovah's Word and by reflecting on the meaning of the divine name. If we apply to ourselves what the Scriptures say about Jehovah's love and concern for his worshippers, including the downhearted, we can reject the satanic lie that Jehovah could never love us or approve of us. (Ps. 34:18; 1 Pet. 5:8) And if we keep in mind that Jehovah always lives up to the meaning of his name, we will not doubt that the Fulfiller of promises is worthy of our complete trust.—Prov. 3:5, 6.

7 What, though, is Satan's primary goal? What does he really want from us? The answer became clear when Satan presented Jesus with a third temptation.

"Fall Down and Do an Act of Worship to Me"

8 **Read Matthew 4:8-11.** With the third temptation, Satan abandoned subtlety and revealed what he was after. Satan

5. How did Jesus respond to the first two temptations?

6, 7. How can we resist Satan's subtle attacks?

8. With the third temptation, how did Satan reveal the real issue?

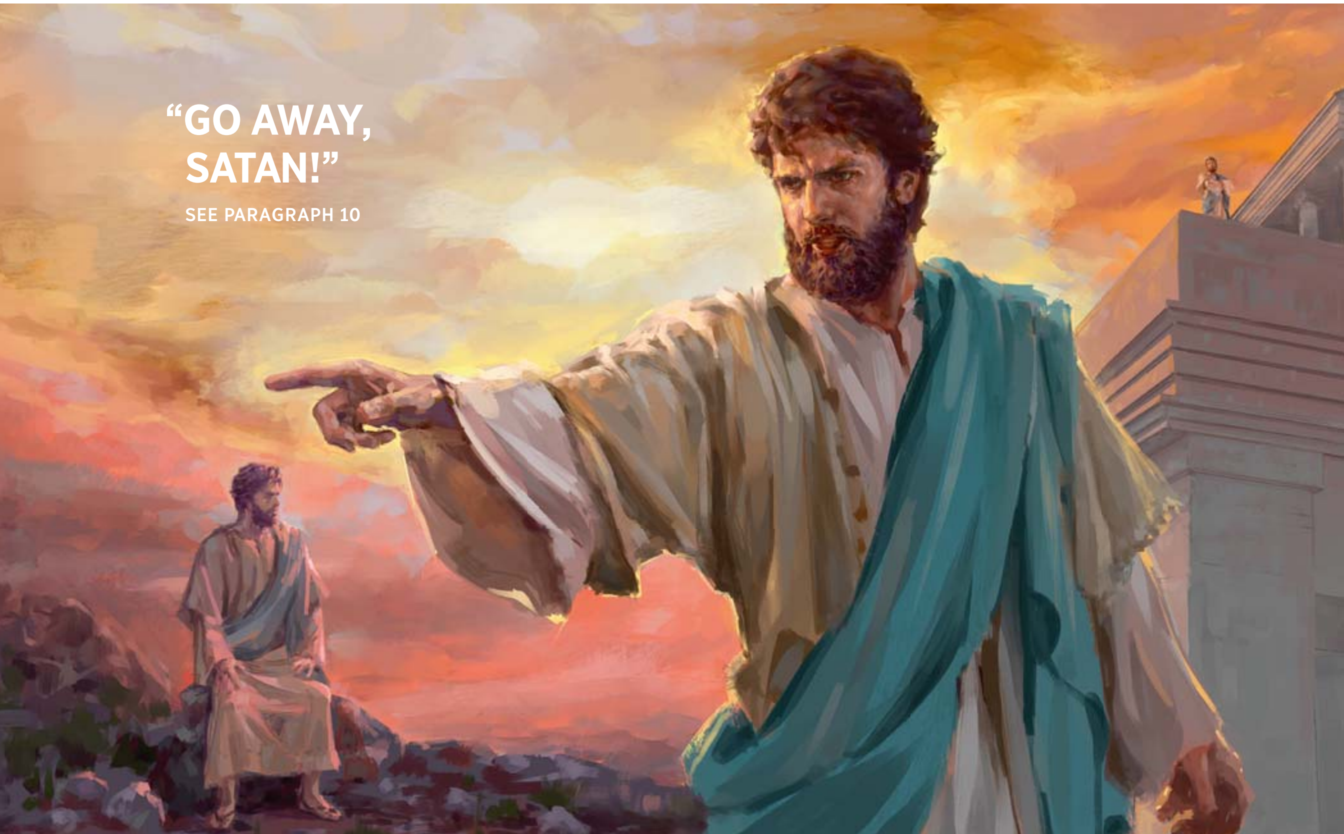
FOOTNOTE

[1] The name Jehovah is understood by some to mean "He Causes to Become." It well fits Jehovah's role both as the Creator and as the Fulfiller of his purposes.

9. (a) What does Satan really want from true worshippers, and how does he try to tempt us? (b) What does our worship involve? (See the box "What Is Worship?")

showed Jesus (likely in a vision) "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory"—but without their corruption. He then told Jesus: "All these things I will give you if you fall down and do an act of worship to me."[2] Worship—that was the real issue! Satan wanted Jesus to abandon his Father and acknowledge the Tempter as his god. Satan offered Jesus what might seem an easy way out. He implied that Jesus would have all the power and wealth of the nations and would not need to suffer—no crown of thorns, no scourging, and no torture stake. The temptation was real. Jesus did not question Satan's dominion over worldly governments! (John 12:31; 1 John 5:19) Surely Satan would have given anything to turn Jesus away from the pure worship of his Father.

9 Today, too, Satan really wants us to give him our worship—either directly or indirectly. As "the god of this system of things," he is the beneficiary of all the false worship offered up by the religions of Babylon the Great. (2 Cor. 4:4) But not content with billions of false worshippers, he wants to tempt true worshippers to go contrary to God's will. He tries to lure us to seek wealth and power in his world rather than


"GO AWAY, SATAN!"

SEE PARAGRAPH 10

FOOTNOTE

[2] Regarding Satan's words, one Bible reference work says: "As in the very first account of testing, failed by Adam and Eve . . . , the question centers on a choice between the will of Satan or the will of God, which involves implicitly the rendering of worship to the one or the other. Satan indeed vaunts himself as god in place of the only God."

pursue a Christian course that may involve suffering "for the sake of righteousness." (1 Pet. 3:14) If we were to give in to the temptation to abandon pure worship and become part of Satan's world, we would, in effect, be bowing down and doing an act of worship to Satan, making him our god. How can we resist such a temptation?

10 Note how Jesus responded to the third temptation. Showing his undivided loyalty to Jehovah, he immediately dismissed the Tempter, saying: "Go away, Satan!" As he did with the first two temptations, Jesus then quoted a scripture from Deuteronomy that contains the divine name: "It is written: 'It is Jehovah your God you must worship, and it is to him alone you must render sacred service.'" (Matt. 4:10; Deut. 6:13) Jesus thus rejected the attraction of a prominent but short-lived worldly career and an easy life without suffering. He recognized that his Father alone deserves to be worshipped and that to perform even a single "act of worship" to Satan would signify submission to him. Jesus steadfastly refused to make the wicked Tempter his god. Having been rebuffed, "the Devil left him."[3]

11 We can resist Satan and the temptations of his wicked world because, like Jesus, we have a choice. Jehovah has given us the precious gift of free will. Hence, no one—not even the powerful, wicked spirit Tempter—can force us to abandon pure worship. When we loyally take our "stand against [Satan], firm in the faith," we are, in effect, saying: "Go away, Satan!" (1 Pet. 5:9) Remember, Satan left after Jesus firmly rejected him. Likewise, the Bible assures us: "Oppose the Devil, and he will flee from you."—Jas. 4:7.

The Enemy of Pure Worship

12 With the final temptation, Satan confirmed that he is the original enemy of pure worship. Thousands of years earlier, in the garden of Eden, Satan first revealed his hatred for worship of Jehovah. By seducing Eve who, in turn, persuaded Adam to disobey Jehovah's command, Satan brought them under his leadership and control. **(Read Genesis 3:1-5;** 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9) In reality, he became their god, and they became his worshippers, even though they may not have known the real identity of the one misleading them. Furthermore, by instigating that rebellion in Eden, Satan not only challenged Jehovah's sovereignty, or right to rule, but also launched an attack on pure worship. How so?

10. How did Jesus respond to the third temptation, and why?

11. How can we resist Satan and his temptations?

12. In Eden, how did Satan reveal that he is the enemy of pure worship?

FOOTNOTE

[3] Luke's Gospel lists the temptations in a different order, but Matthew's account is evidently chronological. Consider three reasons why. (1) Matthew introduces the second temptation with the word "then," suggesting that it was next in sequence. (2) It seems logical that the two subtle temptations—each beginning with the phrase, "If you are a son of God"—would be followed by the overt temptation to break the first commandment. (Ex. 20:2, 3) (3) Jesus' words "Go away, Satan!" would more naturally have followed the third and final temptation. —Matt. 4:5, 10, 11.

13. How is pure worship involved in the issue of sovereignty?

14. Did Satan succeed in his attack on pure worship? Explain.

13 The issue of sovereignty involves pure worship. Only the true Sovereign, the One who "created all things," is worthy of worship. (Rev. 4:11) When Jehovah created the perfect Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden of Eden, He purposed that eventually the entire earth would be filled with perfect humans who would willingly give Him their worship—pure worship from pure hearts. (Gen. 1:28) Satan challenged Jehovah's sovereignty because he coveted that which rightly belongs only to the Sovereign Lord Jehovah—worship.—Jas. 1:14, 15.

14 Did Satan succeed in his attack on pure worship? He managed to turn Adam and Eve away from God. Ever since, Satan has waged war against true worship, seeking to turn as many as possible away from Jehovah God. Satan did not let up in his efforts to tempt Jehovah's worshippers in pre-

• • •
1A

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Worship may be defined as "the act of showing respect and love for a god." In the Bible, the original-language words rendered "worship" may convey the idea of someone showing deep respect, or submission, to creatures. (Matt. 28:9) Those words may also describe a religious act to God or a deity. (John 4:23, 24) The context determines how the words are to be understood.

Only Jehovah, the Creator and Universal Sovereign, is worthy of our exclusive devotion. (Rev. 4:10, 11) We worship Jehovah by showing respect for his sovereignty and by honoring his name. (Ps. 86:9; Matt. 6:9, 10) These two themes—Jehovah's sovereignty and his name—are featured prominently in the book of Ezekiel. The expression "Sovereign Lord Jehovah" is used 217 times in Ezekiel alone, and the statement "know that I am Jehovah," 55 times. —Ezek. 2:4; 6:7.

Our worship, however, is not just a feeling; rather, genuine worship involves action. (Jas. 2:26) When we dedicate our life to Jehovah, we vow that in every aspect of our life, we will obey him as our Sovereign and show the deepest respect for his name. Recall that in his reply to the third temptation, Jesus linked worship with "sacred service." (Matt. 4:10) As worshippers of Jehovah, we are eager to serve him.[a] (Deut. 10:12) We render sacred service to our God when we engage in activities that are directly related to our worship and that call for self-sacrifice. What activities?

Sacred service comes in many forms, all of which are precious to Jehovah. We perform sacred service when we witness to others, share in meetings at our Kingdom Hall, and care for and construct our meeting places. In addition, we render sacred service when we participate in family worship, support the relief work for needy fellow believers, volunteer at our conventions, or serve at Bethel. (Heb. 13:16; Jas. 1:27) When pure worship is foremost in our minds and hearts, we will render "sacred service day and night." We delight in worshipping our God, Jehovah! —Rev. 7:15.

FOOTNOTE

[a] One of the Hebrew words that can express the thought of worship also means "serve." Worship thus involves service. —Ex. 3:12, ftn.

Christian times. In the first century C.E., he wickedly stirred up an apostasy by means of which the Christian congregation became corrupted, and pure worship eventually seemed lost. (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43; Acts 20:29, 30) Beginning in the second century C.E., worshippers entered a long period of spiritual captivity to Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion. But Satan has *not* succeeded in defeating God's purpose regarding pure worship. Nothing can stop God from fulfilling his purpose. (Isa. 46:10; 55:8-11) His name is involved, and he always lives up to his name. Jehovah is the unfailing Fulfiller of his purpose!

15. What steps did Jehovah take in Eden to address the rebels and to ensure that his purpose would succeed?

The Champion of Pure Worship

15 Jehovah took immediate steps in Eden to deal with the rebels and to ensure that his purpose would be fulfilled.

We can choose to resist the temptations of Satan's world
SEE PARAGRAPHS 11, 19

(Read Genesis 3:14-19.) Even while Adam and Eve were still in the garden, Jehovah sentenced the three rebels, doing so in the order in which they had sinned—first Satan, then Eve, and finally Adam. In words directed to Satan, the unseen instigator, Jehovah foretold the coming of an "offspring" who would undo the effects of the rebellion. That promised "offspring" would play a vital role in fulfilling Jehovah's purpose regarding pure worship.

16. Following the rebellion in Eden, how did Jehovah keep his purpose moving forward?

16 Following the rebellion in Eden, Jehovah kept his purpose moving forward. He made arrangements for imperfect humans to worship him acceptably, as we will see in the next chapter. (Heb. 11:4–12:1) He also inspired a number of Bible writers—including Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—to record thrilling prophecies about the restoration of pure worship. That restoration is a prominent Bible theme. Those prophecies would all be fulfilled by the promised "offspring," who turned out to be primarily Jesus Christ. (Gal. 3:16) Jesus is the Champion of pure worship, as he clearly showed by his reply to the third temptation. Yes, Jesus is the one whom Jehovah chose to fulfill the restoration prophecies. (Rev. 19:10) He would deliver God's people from spiritual captivity and restore pure worship to its rightful place.

What Will You Do?

17 It is exciting and faith-strengthening to examine the Bible's restoration prophecies. Those prophecies are close to our heart because we look forward to the time when all creatures in heaven and on earth will be united in the pure worship of the Sovereign Lord Jehovah. Those prophecies also fill us with hope, for they contain some of the most heartwarming assurances found in God's Word. Who of us is not eager to see the fulfillment of Jehovah's promises—including the resurrection of our dead loved ones, an earth-wide paradise, and endless life in perfect health?—Isa. 33:24; 35:5, 6; Rev. 20:12, 13; 21:3, 4.

18 In this publication, we will examine the thrilling prophecies found in the Bible book of Ezekiel. Many of those prophecies focus on the restoration of pure worship. We will discuss how Ezekiel's prophecies relate to other prophecies, how they will be fulfilled through Christ, and how they involve us.—See the box "An Overview of Ezekiel."

19 Back in the wilderness of Judea in 29 C.E., Satan failed in his attempt to get Jesus to turn his back on pure worship. But what about us? Satan is more determined than ever to draw us away from true worship. (Rev. 12:12, 17) May this publication help us to strengthen our resolve to resist that wicked Tempter. And may we by our words and actions show that we are in heart harmony with the words, "It is Jehovah your God you must worship." Then we will have the prospect of living to see Jehovah's glorious purpose fulfilled at last—everyone in heaven and on earth united in giving Jehovah what he so richly deserves, pure worship from pure hearts!

17. Why are the Bible's restoration prophecies close to our heart?

18. What will we examine in this publication?

19. What are you resolved to do, and why?

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

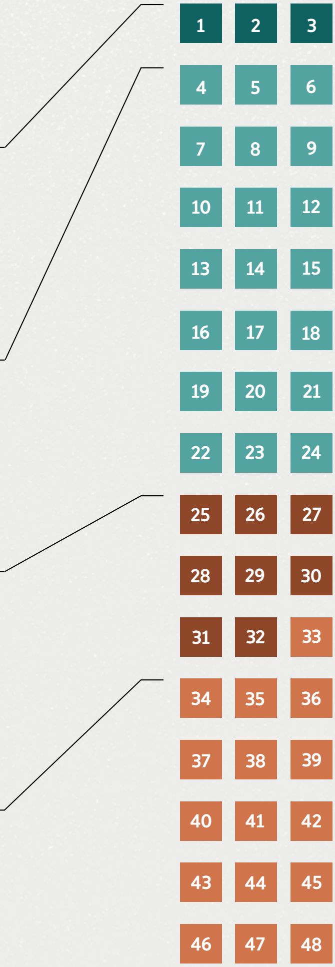
1 What tactics did Satan use in his first two temptations of Jesus, and how does Satan tempt us in similar ways?

2 As shown by the third temptation of Jesus, what does Satan want from us, and how can we resist his lures?

3 How can you demonstrate that you agree with the words: "It is Jehovah your God you must worship"?

AN OVERVIEW OF EZEKIEL

Generally speaking, the book of Ezekiel
may be divided as follows:



CHAPTERS 1 TO 3

In 613 B.C.E., while living among the Jewish exiles in Babylon, Ezekiel sees visions of Jehovah and is commissioned to prophesy to the Jews living by the river Chebar.

CHAPTERS 4 TO 24

Between 613 and 609 B.C.E., Ezekiel delivers prophetic messages consisting primarily of judgment against Jerusalem and her rebellious, idolatrous people.

CHAPTERS 25 TO 32

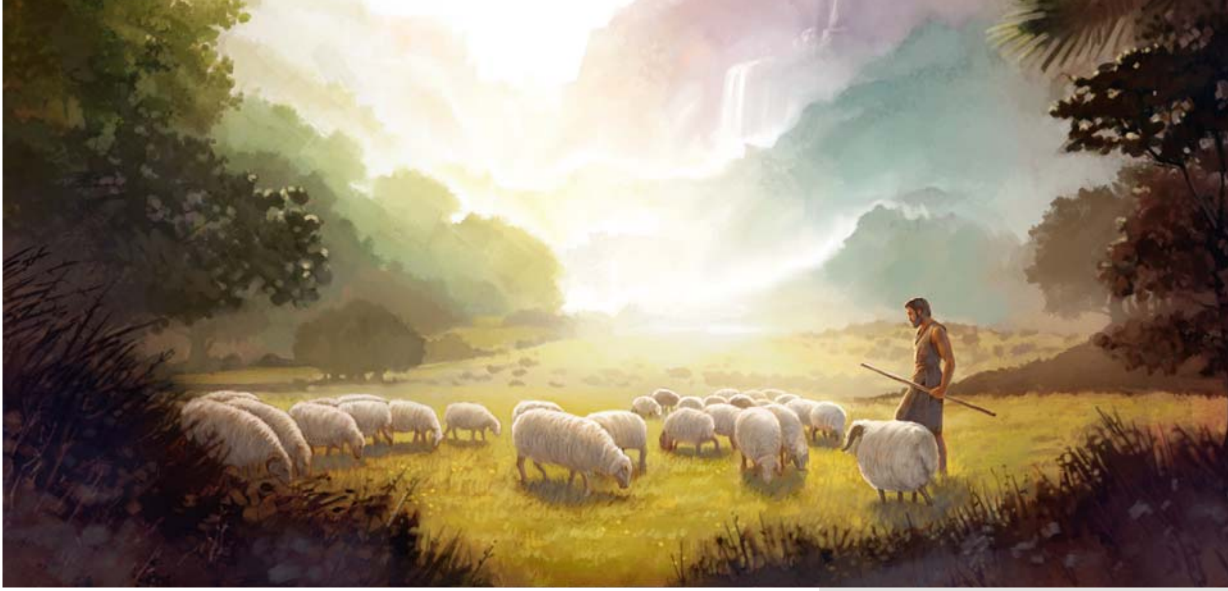
Starting in 609 B.C.E., the year the final Babylonian siege of Jerusalem began, Ezekiel's message of judgment shifts from Jerusalem to surrounding enemy nations—Ammon, Edom, Egypt, Moab, Philistia, Sidon, and Tyre.

CHAPTERS 33 TO 48

Starting in 606 B.C.E., with Jerusalem and its temple lying in ruins hundreds of miles away, Ezekiel focuses on a message of hope—the thrilling restoration of the pure worship of Jehovah God.

The book of Ezekiel is thus basically arranged chronologically as well as topically. Prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple come before the bulk of the prophecies about the restoration of pure worship. That makes sense, for the restoration prophecies presuppose that worship at the temple had ceased.

In addition, Ezekiel's prophecies against the surrounding enemy nations (chapters 25 to 32) are inserted between his judgment messages against Jerusalem and the prophecies about the restoration of pure worship. Commenting on Ezekiel's judgment messages to the nations, one scholar observes: "They form a suitable transition from the declaration of God's wrath to that of His mercy towards His people, because the punishment of their enemies is in itself a part of the deliverance of His people."



2

“GOD APPROVED” THEIR GIFTS

HEBREWS 11:4

FOCUS: *A history of Jehovah’s arrangement for pure worship*

ABEL carefully inspects his flock. He has lovingly raised these animals from birth. Now, he selects some, slaughters them, and presents them as a gift to God. Will this act of worship, offered by an imperfect human, be acceptable to Jehovah?

1-3. (a) What questions will we consider? (b) What four key elements of pure worship will we discuss? (See opening picture.)

2 The apostle Paul was inspired to write regarding Abel: “God approved his gifts.” Jehovah, however, rejected Cain’s offering. **(Read Hebrews 11:4.)** This raises questions that we need to consider. Why did God accept worship from Abel but not from Cain? What can we learn from the examples of Cain and Abel and from others mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11? The answers will deepen our understanding of what is involved in pure worship.

3 As we discuss this brief overview of events from the time of Abel to Ezekiel’s day, note four key elements that in combination make worship acceptable to God: The *recipient* must be Jehovah, the *quality* must be the best, the *manner* has to be approved by God, and the *motive* of the worshipper needs to be pure.

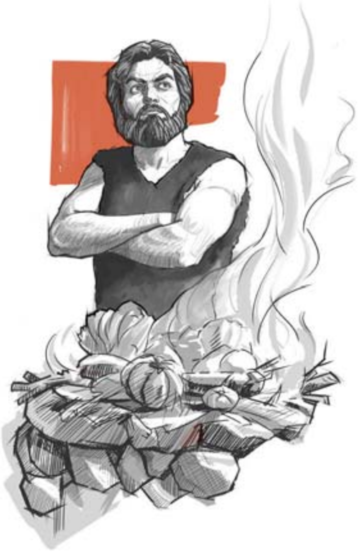
Why Was Cain's Worship Rejected?

4, 5. What led Cain to conclude that the recipient of his gift would be Jehovah?

6, 7. Was there something wrong with the quality or manner of Cain's sacrifice? Explain.

4 **Read Genesis 4:2-5.** Cain knew that the *recipient* of his gift would be Jehovah. Cain had plenty of time and opportunity to learn about Jehovah. He and his brother Abel may have been close to 100 years old at the time that they offered their gifts.[1] Both boys had grown up knowing of the garden in Eden, maybe even seeing that fertile park from a distance. Certainly they would have seen the cherubs blocking entrance to it. (Gen. 3:24) The boys' parents no doubt told them that Jehovah created all life and that his original purpose for mankind was different from what they were now experiencing—a slow decline into death. (Gen. 1:24-28) Knowing these things may have led Cain to conclude that he should offer his gift to God.

5 What else may have prompted Cain to offer his sacrifice? Jehovah had foretold that an "offspring" would arise, someone who would crush the head of "the serpent" that had seduced Eve into making her terrible choice. (Gen. 3:4-6, 14, 15) Cain, as firstborn, may have thought that he was that promised "offspring." (Gen. 4:1) In addition, Jehovah had not cut off all communication with sinful humans; even after Adam sinned, God spoke to him, evidently by means of an angel. (Gen. 3:8-10) And Jehovah talked with Cain after he offered his sacrifice. (Gen. 4:6) Without doubt, Cain knew that Jehovah is worthy of worship.



Cain's motive was not pure

SEE PARAGRAPHS 8, 9

6 Why, then, did Jehovah not look with any favor on Cain's offering? Was there something wrong with the *quality* of the gift? The Bible does not say. It simply says that Cain brought "fruits of the land." Jehovah later indicated in the Law that he gave to Moses that this type of sacrifice was acceptable. (Num. 15:8, 9) Also, consider the circumstances. At this point in history, humans ate only vegetation. (Gen. 1:29) And because the ground outside of Eden was cursed by God, Cain had toiled to produce his offering. (Gen. 3:17-19) He offered hard-won, life-sustaining food! Even so, Jehovah did not approve of Cain's offering.

7 Was there, then, something wrong with the *manner* in which the gift was made? Did Cain fail to offer it in an acceptable way? That seems unlikely. Why so? Because when Jeho-

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FOOTNOTE

[1] Abel likely was conceived shortly after Adam and Eve were put out of Eden. (Gen. 4:1, 2) Genesis 4:25 says that God appointed Seth "in place of Abel." Adam was 130 when he became father to Seth, after Abel's violent death. (Gen. 5:3) So Abel may have been about 100 years old when Cain killed him.

vah rejected Cain's offering, He did not condemn the manner in which the offering was made. In fact, there is no mention of how either Cain or Abel made their offering. What, then, was the problem?

8 Paul's inspired words to the Hebrews show that Cain's *motive* for making the offering was not pure. Cain lacked faith. (Heb. 11:4; 1 John 3:11, 12) That is why Jehovah did not look with any favor on *Cain*—the man himself—not just his offering. (Gen. 4:5-8) Jehovah is a loving Father, so he kindly tried to correct his son. But Cain, in effect, slapped away Jehovah's helping hand. Cain's figurative heart festered with works of the imperfect flesh—"hostility, strife, jealousy." (Gal. 5:19, 20) Cain's bad heart made any other positive aspects of his worship worthless. His example teaches us that pure worship requires more than just an outward display of devotion to Jehovah.

9 The Bible record tells us much about Cain—we hear Jehovah speak to him, we read Cain's answers, and we even learn the names of his children and about some of the things they did. (Gen. 4:17-24) As for Abel, we have no record of his having children and nothing he said is preserved in the Bible. Even so, Abel's actions still speak to us today. In what way?

Abel Sets the Pattern for Pure Worship

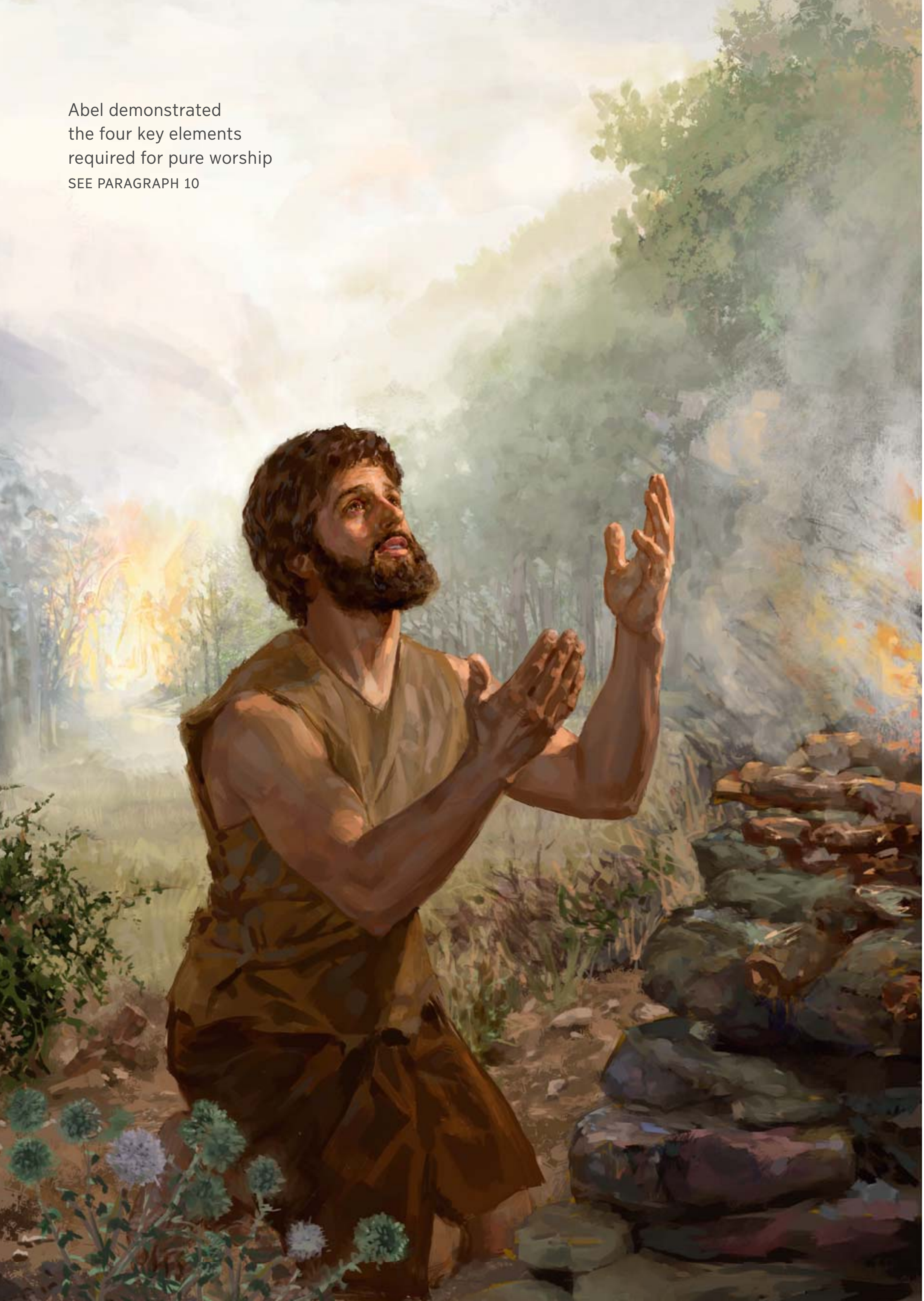
10 Abel made his offering to Jehovah, knowing that He is the only worthy *recipient*. The *quality* of the gift was the best —Abel selected "some firstlings of his flock." Although the record does not state whether he sacrificed them on an altar or not, the *manner* in which he offered his gift was obviously acceptable. But what stands out about Abel's gift—the example that still instructs us after some six millenniums—is his *motive* for giving it. Abel was stirred by faith in God and by a love of Jehovah's righteous standards. How do we know?

11 First, consider what Jesus said about Abel, a man he knew well. Jesus was alive in heaven when Abel walked the earth. Jesus was keenly interested in this son of Adam. (Prov. 8:22, 30, 31; John 8:58; Col. 1:15, 16) So Jesus was providing eyewitness testimony when he described Abel as a righteous man. (Matt. 23:35) A righteous person is someone who acknowledges that Jehovah should set the standard of right and wrong. But he does more—he proves by his speech and actions that he agrees with those standards. (Compare Luke 1:5, 6.) It takes time to gain a reputation as someone

8, 9. (a) Why did Jehovah not look with any favor on Cain or his offering? (b) What do you find noteworthy about the information that the Bible records about Cain and Abel?

10. How did Abel set the pattern for pure worship?

11. Why did Jesus describe Abel as righteous?



Abel demonstrated the four key elements required for pure worship

SEE PARAGRAPH 10

who is righteous. So even before offering his gift to God, Abel must have built up a record of living according to Jehovah's standards. That would have been a difficult path to walk. His older brother was unlikely to have been a positive influence —Cain's heart had become wicked. (1 John 3:12) Abel's mother had disobeyed a direct command from God, and his father had rebelled against Jehovah, wanting to decide for himself what is good and what is bad. (Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:6) What courage Abel showed to choose a course so different from the one his family pursued!

12 Next, note how the apostle Paul linked the qualities of faith and righteousness. "By faith," wrote Paul, "Abel offered God a sacrifice of greater worth than that of Cain, and through that faith he received the witness that he was righteous." (Heb. 11:4) Paul's words indicate that unlike Cain, Abel was motivated by lifelong, heartfelt faith in Jehovah and in His way of doing things.

13 Abel's example teaches us that pure worship can come only from a heart that has pure motives—a heart full of faith in Jehovah and in complete agreement with his righteous standards. In addition, we learn that pure worship requires more than a single act of devotion. It involves our whole life, our entire course of conduct.

The Patriarchs Follow the Pattern

14 Abel was the first imperfect man to offer Jehovah pure worship, but he was by no means the last. The apostle Paul mentions others who worshipped Jehovah acceptably—such men as Noah, Abraham, and Jacob. **(Read Hebrews 11:7, 8, 17-21.)** At some point in their lives, each of these patriarchs offered Jehovah a sacrifice, and God approved their gifts. Why? Because these men did more than perform formal acts of devotion—each of them also fulfilled all the key requirements of pure worship. Consider their examples.

15 **Noah** was born just 126 years after Adam died; yet, he grew up in a world perverted by false worship.[2] (Gen. 6:11) Of all the families alive on earth just prior to the Flood, only Noah and his family served Jehovah acceptably. (2 Pet. 2:5) After surviving the Flood, Noah felt moved to construct an altar, the first specifically mentioned in the Bible, and to offer sacrifices to Jehovah. By this heartfelt act, Noah sent a clear message to his family and to the rest of the human race that would descend from him—Jehovah is the only worthy

12. What was a key difference between Cain and Abel?

13. What does Abel's example teach us?

14. Why did Jehovah accept the gifts offered by Noah, Abraham, and Jacob?

15, 16. How did Noah fulfill the four key requirements of pure worship?

FOOTNOTE

[2] Genesis 4:26 states that in the time of Enosh, Adam's grandson, "people began calling on the name of Jehovah." However, they were evidently doing so in a disrespectful manner, possibly associating Jehovah's name with idols.

recipient of worship. Of all the animals available to him for sacrifice, Noah chose "some of all the clean animals and of all the clean flying creatures." (Gen. 8:20) These were the best *quality* offerings because Jehovah himself had declared them clean.—Gen. 7:2.

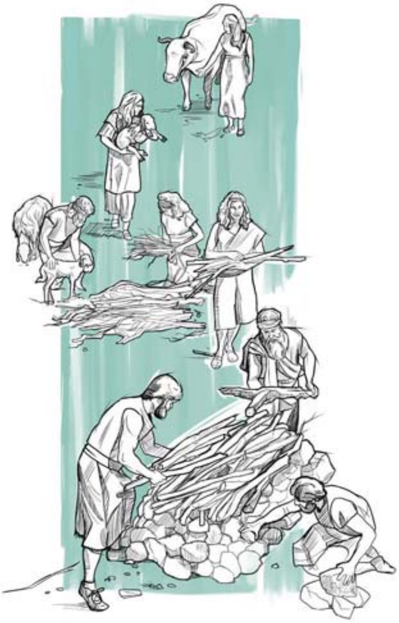
16 Noah offered these burnt sacrifices on the altar he built. Was this *manner* of worship acceptable? Yes. The account says that Jehovah found the aroma from the offering pleasing and then blessed Noah and his sons. (Gen. 8:21; 9:1) However, Jehovah accepted the offering primarily because of Noah's *motive* for giving it. The sacrifices were one more expression of Noah's strong faith in Jehovah and in His way of doing things. Because Noah so consistently obeyed Jehovah and upheld His standards, the Bible says that he "walked with the true God." As a result, Noah gained a lasting reputation as a righteous man.—Gen. 6:9; Ezek. 14:14; Heb. 11:7.

17, 18. How did Abraham fulfill the four key requirements of pure worship?

19, 20. How did Jacob fulfill the four key requirements of pure worship?

17 **Abraham** was surrounded by false worship. The city of Ur, Abraham's home, was dominated by a temple honoring the moon-god Nanna.[3] Even Abraham's own father at one time worshipped false gods. (Josh. 24:2) Yet, Abraham chose to worship Jehovah. He likely learned about the true God from his ancestor Shem, one of Noah's sons. Their lives overlapped by 150 years.

18 Throughout his long life, Abraham offered many sacrifices. But these formal acts of worship were always directed to the only worthy *recipient,* Jehovah. (Gen. 12:8; 13:18; 15:8-10) Was Abraham prepared to give Jehovah the best *quality* offering? That question was answered beyond doubt when Abraham showed his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. On that occasion, Jehovah spelled out exactly the *manner* in which Abraham should make the sacrifice. (Gen. 22:1, 2) And Abraham was willing to follow that direction down to the last detail. It was Jehovah who stopped Abraham from actually killing his son. (Gen. 22:9-12) Jehovah accepted Abraham's acts of worship because they were offered by a man whose *motives* were pure. "Abraham put faith in Jehovah," wrote Paul, "and it was counted to him as righteousness."—Rom. 4:3.


Noah's sacrifices sent a clear message
SEE PARAGRAPHS 15, 16

19 **Jacob** spent much of his life in Canaan, the land Jehovah had promised to Abraham and his descendants. (Gen. 17:1, 8) It was a place where people had become engrossed in worship so perverted that Jehovah said that the land would

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FOOTNOTE

[3] The male deity Nanna was also known by the name Sin. Although the inhabitants of Ur worshipped a number of gods, the temples and altars in that city were primarily devoted to him.

"vomit its inhabitants out." (Lev. 18:24, 25) When he was 77 years old, Jacob left Canaan, married, and later returned with a large household. (Gen. 28:1, 2; 33:18) Some of his family, however, had been influenced by false worship. Even so, when Jehovah invited Jacob to go to Bethel and build an altar, Jacob acted decisively. He first told his family: "Get rid of the foreign gods that are in your midst, and cleanse yourselves." He then faithfully followed the instructions he had received. —Gen. 35:1-7.

20 Jacob built a number of altars in the Promised Land, but the *recipient* of his worship was always Jehovah. (Gen. 35:14; 46:1) The *quality* of his sacrifices, the *manner* in which he worshipped God, and his *motive* for doing so were such that the Bible refers to Jacob as "blameless," an expression that describes those who are approved by God. (Gen. 25:27) By his entire life course, Jacob set an outstanding example for the nation of Israel, which would descend from him. —Gen. 35:9-12.

21 What can we learn about pure worship from the examples set by the patriarchs? Like them, we are surrounded by people, maybe even family members, who could distract us from giving Jehovah exclusive devotion. To resist such pressure, we must develop strong faith in Jehovah and be convinced that his righteous standards are best. We express that faith by obeying Jehovah and by devoting our time, energy, and resources to serving him. (Matt. 22:37-40; 1 Cor. 10:31) How encouraging it is to know that when we worship Jehovah to the best of our ability, in the way he asks, and with pure motives, he views us as righteous!—**Read James 2:18-24.**

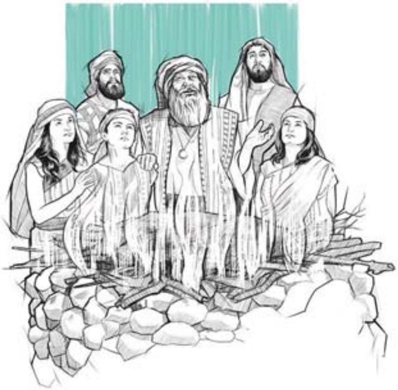
A Nation Devoted to Pure Worship

22 Jehovah provided Jacob's descendants with the Law code, leaving them in no doubt about what he required of them. If they obeyed Jehovah, they would become his "special property" and "a holy nation." (Ex. 19:5, 6) Notice how the Law emphasized the four key elements of pure worship.

23 Jehovah clearly identified who the *recipient* of the Israelites' worship should be. "You must not have any other gods besides me," declared Jehovah. (Ex. 20:3-5) The sacrifices they offered to him had to be of the highest *quality.* For example, animal sacrifices were to be sound, without any defect. (Lev. 1:3; Deut. 15:21; compare Malachi 1:6-8.) The Levites

21. What can we learn about pure worship from the examples set by the patriarchs?

22-24. How did the Law emphasize the importance of the recipient, the quality, and the manner of Israel's sacrifices?



Jacob set an example for his family

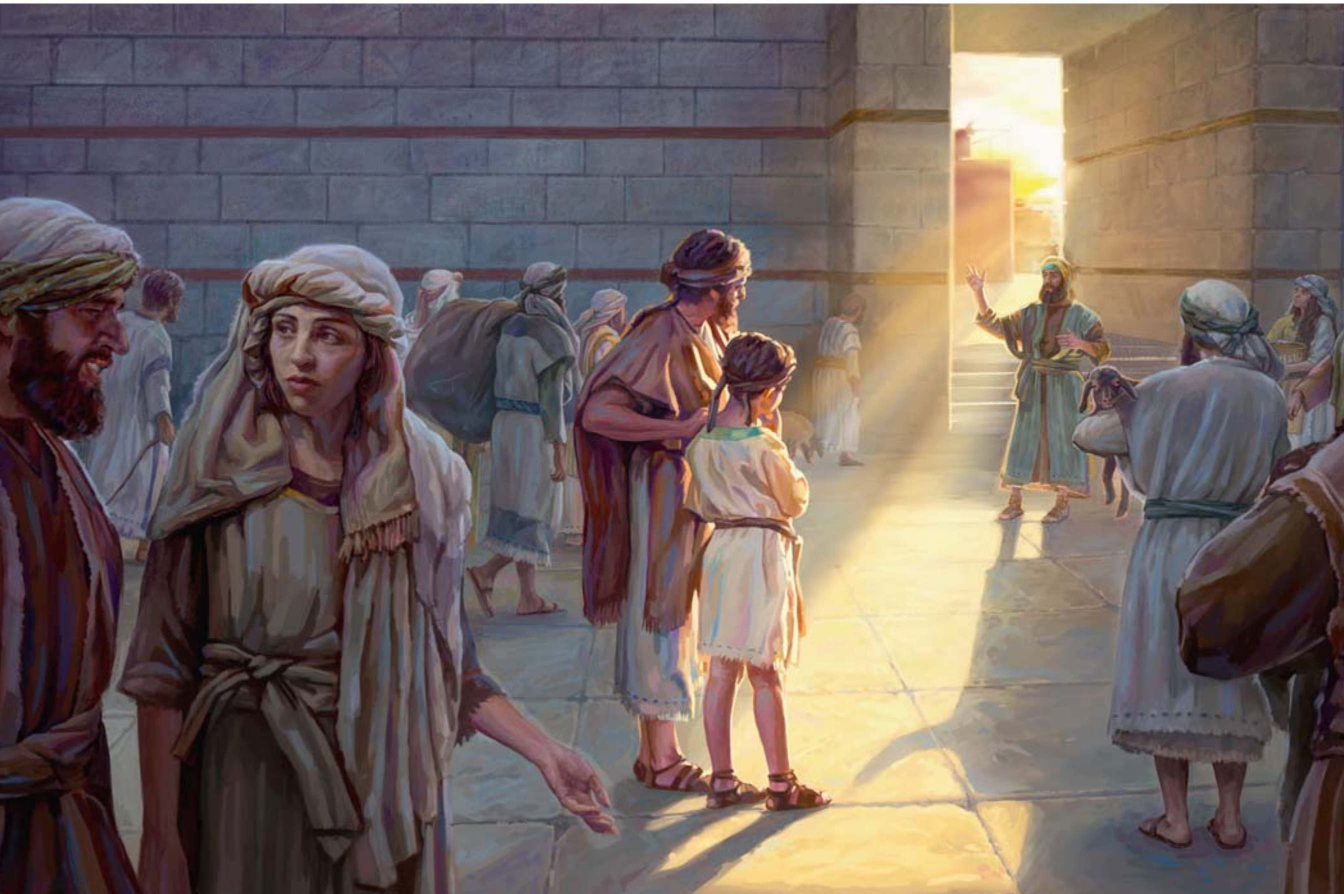
SEE PARAGRAPHS 19, 20

benefited from the gifts given to Jehovah, but they too made personal offerings. What they gave had to come from among “the very best of all the gifts given” to them. (Num. 18:29) Regarding the *manner* in which they worshipped, the Israelites were given specific direction about what, where, and how sacrifices should be made to Jehovah. In total, they were given more than 600 laws to govern their behavior, and they were told: “Be careful to do just as Jehovah your God has commanded you. You must not turn to the right or to the left.”—Deut. 5:32.

24 Did it really matter where the Israelites offered their sacrifices? Yes. Jehovah instructed his people to build a tabernacle, and it became the center for pure worship. (Ex. 40:1-3, 29, 34) At that time, if the Israelites wanted their offerings to be approved by God, they had to bring them to the tabernacle.[4]—Deut. 12:17, 18.

25 What mattered more, however, was an Israelite’s *motive* for offering his gift! He had to be motivated by heartfelt love

25. Regarding sacrifices, what mattered most? Explain.



Ezekiel’s father no doubt taught him about Jehovah and the Law

SEE PARAGRAPH 28

FOOTNOTE

[4] After the sacred Ark was removed from the tabernacle, it seems that Jehovah approved of sacrifices being offered at locations other than the tabernacle.—1 Sam. 4:3, 11; 7:7-9; 10:8; 11:14, 15; 16:4, 5; 1 Chron. 21:26-30.

for Jehovah and for his standards. **(Read Deuteronomy 6:4-6.)** When the Israelites merely went through the motions associated with pure worship, Jehovah rejected their sacrifices. (Isa. 1:10-13) Through the prophet Isaiah, Jehovah revealed that he is not deceived by an empty show of devotion, saying: "This people . . . honor me with their lips, but their heart is far removed from me."—Isa. 29:13.

Worship at the Temple

26 Centuries after Israel settled in the Promised Land, King Solomon built a center for pure worship that was far grander than the tabernacle. (1 Ki. 7:51; 2 Chron. 3:1, 6, 7) At first, Jehovah was the only *recipient* of the sacrifices offered at this temple. Solomon and his subjects offered vast quantities of sacrifices of high *quality* in the *manner* outlined in God's Law. (1 Ki. 8:63) However, the cost of the building and the number of sacrifices were not what made worship at the temple acceptable to Jehovah. What mattered was the *motive* of those offering the gifts. Solomon emphasized that point at the dedication of the temple. He said: "Let your heart be complete with Jehovah our God by walking in his regulations and by keeping his commandments as on this day."—1 Ki. 8:57-61.

27 Unfortunately, the Israelites did not continue to follow the king's wise counsel. They failed to fulfill one or more of the key aspects of pure worship. The kings of Israel and their subjects allowed their hearts to be corrupted, they lost faith in Jehovah, and they abandoned his righteous standards. Time and again, Jehovah lovingly sent prophets to correct them and to warn them of the consequences of their actions. (Jer. 7:13-15, 23-26) Noteworthy among those prophets was the faithful man Ezekiel. He lived at a critical time in the history of pure worship.

Ezekiel Sees Pure Worship Corrupted

28 Ezekiel was intimately acquainted with worship at the temple built by Solomon. His father was a priest and would have taken his turn serving at the temple. (Ezek. 1:3) Ezekiel's early years likely were happy. His father no doubt taught him about Jehovah and the Law. In fact, about the time that Ezekiel was born, "the book of the Law" was found in the temple.[5] The reigning monarch, good King Josiah, was so moved by what he heard that he increased his efforts to promote pure worship.—2 Ki. 22:8-13.

26. At first, what role did the temple built by Solomon play in pure worship?

27. What did the kings of Israel and their subjects do, and how did Jehovah respond?

28, 29. What do we know about Ezekiel? (See the box "Ezekiel—His Life and Times.")

FOOTNOTE

[5] It seems that Ezekiel was 30 years old when he began prophesying in the year 613 B.C.E. So apparently he was born about the year 643 B.C.E. (Ezek. 1:1) Josiah began his reign in 659 B.C.E., and the book of the Law, likely the original, was found sometime near the 18th year of his kingship, or about the year 642-641 B.C.E.

29 Like the faithful men before him, Ezekiel fulfilled the four requirements of pure worship. As a consideration of the book of Ezekiel shows, he served Jehovah exclusively, gave his best continually, and obediently did what Jehovah asked of him and in the manner He required. Ezekiel did all of this because he was motivated by heartfelt faith. The same could not be said of the majority of his contemporaries. Ezekiel had grown up listening to the prophecies of Jeremiah, who began his work in 647 B.C.E. and who zealously warned of Jehovah's coming judgment.

30. (a) What do the prophecies recorded by Ezekiel reveal? (b) What is prophecy, and how should those conveyed by Ezekiel be understood? (See the box "Understanding Ezekiel's Prophecies.")

30 Ezekiel's inspired writings reveal how far God's people had strayed from serving Him. **(Read Ezekiel 8:6.)** When Jehovah began to discipline Judah, Ezekiel was among those taken captive to Babylon. (2 Ki. 24:11-17) Although taken prisoner, Ezekiel was not being punished. Jehovah had work for him to do among His exiled people. The stunning visions and prophecies recorded by Ezekiel outline how pure worship would be restored in Jerusalem. But they also do much more—they give insight into how pure worship will eventually be completely restored for all who love Jehovah.

31. What will this publication help us to do?

31 In the sections of this publication that follow, we will gain a glimpse into the realm where Jehovah resides, discover just how completely pure worship was defiled, learn how Jehovah restores and defends his people, and peer into the future when every living human will worship Jehovah. In the following chapter, we will consider the first vision Ezekiel recorded. It impresses on our imagination a picture of Jehovah and the heavenly part of his organization, emphasizing why he alone is worthy of exclusive, pure worship.

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

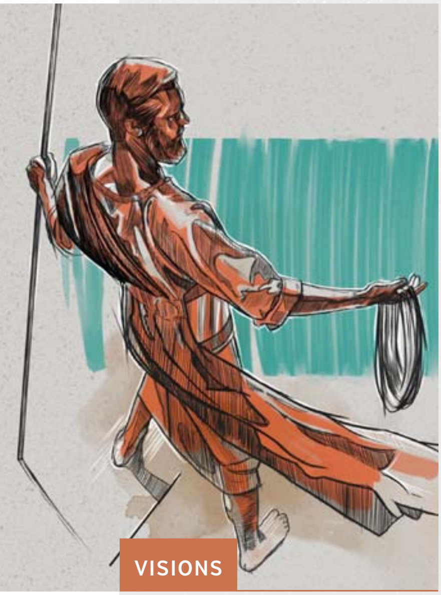
1 Why did Jehovah reject worship from Cain but accept it from Abel?

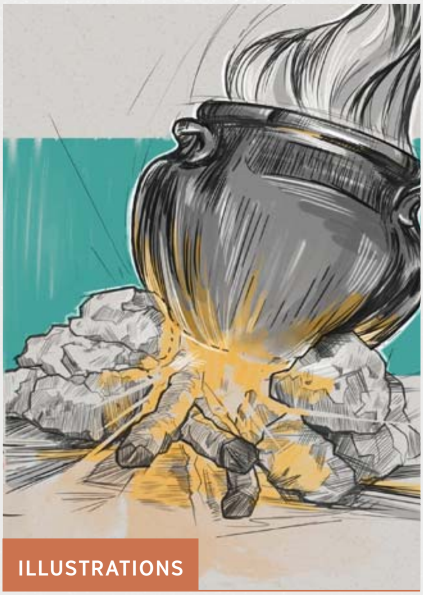
2 What did you learn about pure worship from the examples of the patriarchs?

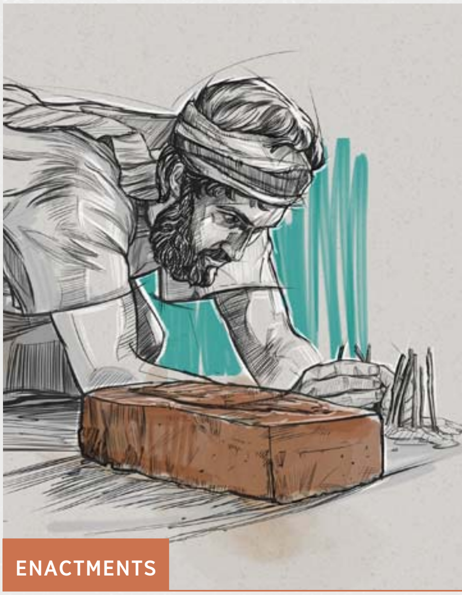
3 Which section of this publication are you especially looking forward to studying?

2A

UNDERSTANDING EZEKIEL’S PROPHECIES


VISIONS


ILLUSTRATIONS


ENACTMENTS

DEFINITION—WHAT IS PROPHECY?

In the Bible, the Hebrew verb *na·vaʼʹ,* rendered “prophesy,” refers primarily to declaring an inspired message, judgment, moral teaching, or command from God. It can also refer to making a divine declaration of something to come. Ezekiel’s prophecies include all those types of divine revelations.—Ezek. 3: 10, 11; 11:4-8; 14:6, 7; 37:9, 10; 38:1-4.

METHODS OF DELIVERY

The book of Ezekiel contains visions, illustrations, parables, and enactments of prophetic messages.

FULFILLMENTS

Prophecies related by Ezekiel sometimes have more than one fulfillment. For example, the prophecies of restoration had a limited fulfillment when God’s people returned to the Promised Land. But as discussed in Chapter 9 of this publication, many of those restoration prophecies have a fulfillment today and will again be fulfilled in the future.

In the past, we have viewed a number of elements in Ezekiel’s prophecies as the basis for a type-antitype fulfillment. This publication, however, refrains from describing any person, object, place, or event as a prophetic type that has a modern antitype unless there is a clear basis in Scripture for doing so.[a] Rather, it will point to the greater fulfillment of many of Ezekiel’s prophecies. It will also examine the lessons we can learn from Ezekiel’s message, as well as from the people, places, and events mentioned by him.

FOOTNOTE

[a] For a discussion of types and antitypes, see *The Watchtower,* March 15, 2015, pp. 9-11, pars. 7-12; and “Questions From Readers,” pp. 17-18 of that same issue.

EZEKIEL
HIS LIFE AND TIMES

Ezekiel means "God Strengthens." While the prophecies he relates contain many warnings, the overall message is in harmony with the meaning of his name and strengthens the faith of those who want to give God pure worship.

CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS

JEREMIAH, from a priestly family, served mostly in Jerusalem (647-580 B.C.E.)

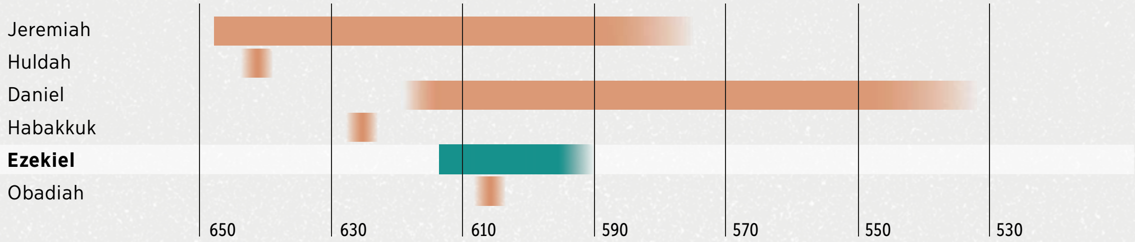
HULDAH served when the book of the Law was discovered in the temple about 642 B.C.E.

DANIEL, part of the royal tribe of Judah, was taken to Babylon in 617 B.C.E.

HABAKKUK likely served in Judah early in Jehoiakim's reign

OBADIAH prophesied against Edom, likely at the time of Jerusalem's destruction

WHEN DID THEY PROPHESY? (ALL DATES B.C.E.)



KEY EVENTS SURROUNDING EZEKIEL'S LIFETIME

(ALL DATES B.C.E.)

c.643: Born

617: Taken captive to Babylon

613: Begins prophesying; sees vision of Jehovah

612: Sees vision of apostasy at the temple

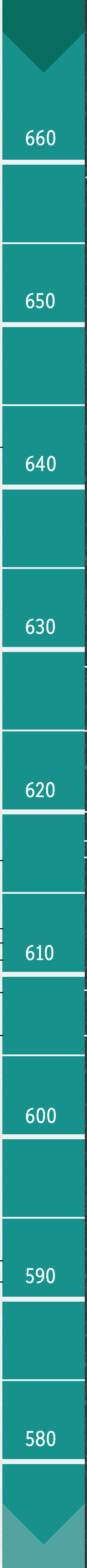
611: Begins to denounce Jerusalem

609: Wife dies and the final siege of Jerusalem begins

607: Receives confirmation that Jerusalem has been destroyed

593: Sees vision of the temple

591: Foretells Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt; completes writing



KINGS OF JUDAH AND BABYLON

659-629: Josiah promotes pure worship but dies in battle against Pharaoh Nechoh

628: Jehoahaz rules badly for three months and is captured by Pharaoh Nechoh

628-618: Jehoiakim is a bad king and is made a vassal by Pharaoh Nechoh

625: Nebuchadnezzar defeats the Egyptian army

620: Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah for the first time and makes Jehoiakim a vassal in Jerusalem

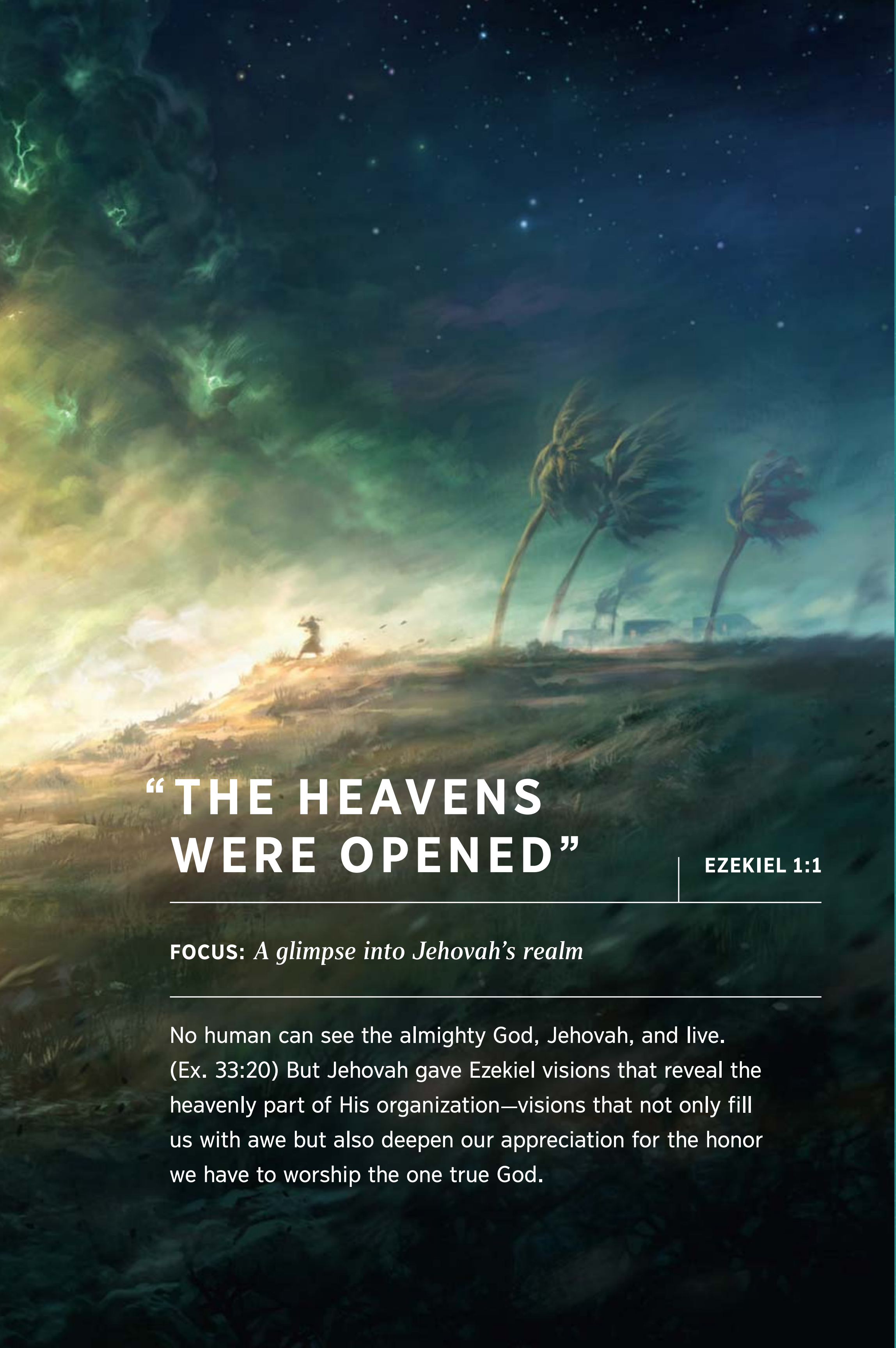
618: Jehoiakim rebels against Nebuchadnezzar but likely dies during the Babylonians' second invasion of the Promised Land

617: Jehoiachin, also known as Jeconiah, is a bad king who rules for three months and then surrenders to Nebuchadnezzar

617-607: Zedekiah, a wicked, weak-willed king, is made a vassal by Nebuchadnezzar

609: Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar, who then invades Judah for a third time

607: Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem, captures Zedekiah, blinds him, and takes him to Babylon



1

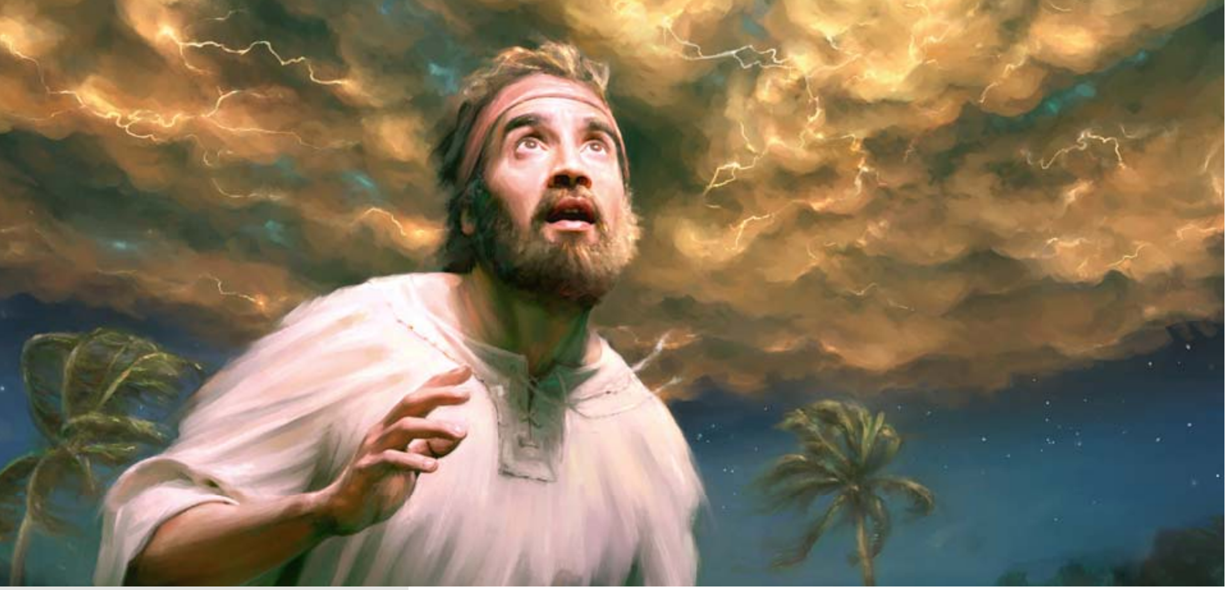
SECTION ONE

“THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED”

EZEKIEL 1:1

FOCUS: *A glimpse into Jehovah’s realm*

No human can see the almighty God, Jehovah, and live. (Ex. 33:20) But Jehovah gave Ezekiel visions that reveal the heavenly part of His organization—visions that not only fill us with awe but also deepen our appreciation for the honor we have to worship the one true God.



3

“I BEGAN TO SEE VISIONS OF GOD”

EZEKIEL 1:1

FOCUS: *An overview of Ezekiel’s vision of the celestial chariot*

1-3. (a) Describe what Ezekiel sees and hears. (See opening picture.) (b) What was the power behind Ezekiel’s experience, and how was he affected?

EZEKIEL stares into the distance, peering out across the broad, sandy plain. His eyes narrow, then open wide. He can scarcely believe what he is seeing. There, near the horizon, a tempest is brewing. But it is no ordinary storm. As a fierce wind from the north whips his hair and clothing about, he sees an immense, towering cloud. It is lit up from within by flashing fire, and its glow reminds him of molten precious metal.[1] As the cloud rushes toward Ezekiel, a sound grows louder and louder—a roaring like a great army on the move. —Ezek. 1:4, 24.

2 At about 30 years of age, this young man is having the first of a series of unforgettable experiences. He feels “the hand of Jehovah” upon him, the irresistible power of Jehovah’s holy spirit. What that spirit will cause him to see and hear will be spectacular, far more amazing than any special-effects movie created by today’s filmmakers. Ezekiel’s vision

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FOOTNOTE

[1] Ezekiel specified electrum, an alloy of silver and gold.

will leave him facedown on the ground, completely overwhelmed.—Ezek. 1:3, 28.

4, 5. What was the setting of Ezekiel's vision?

6, 7. Why might Ezekiel have felt that he lived in dark times?

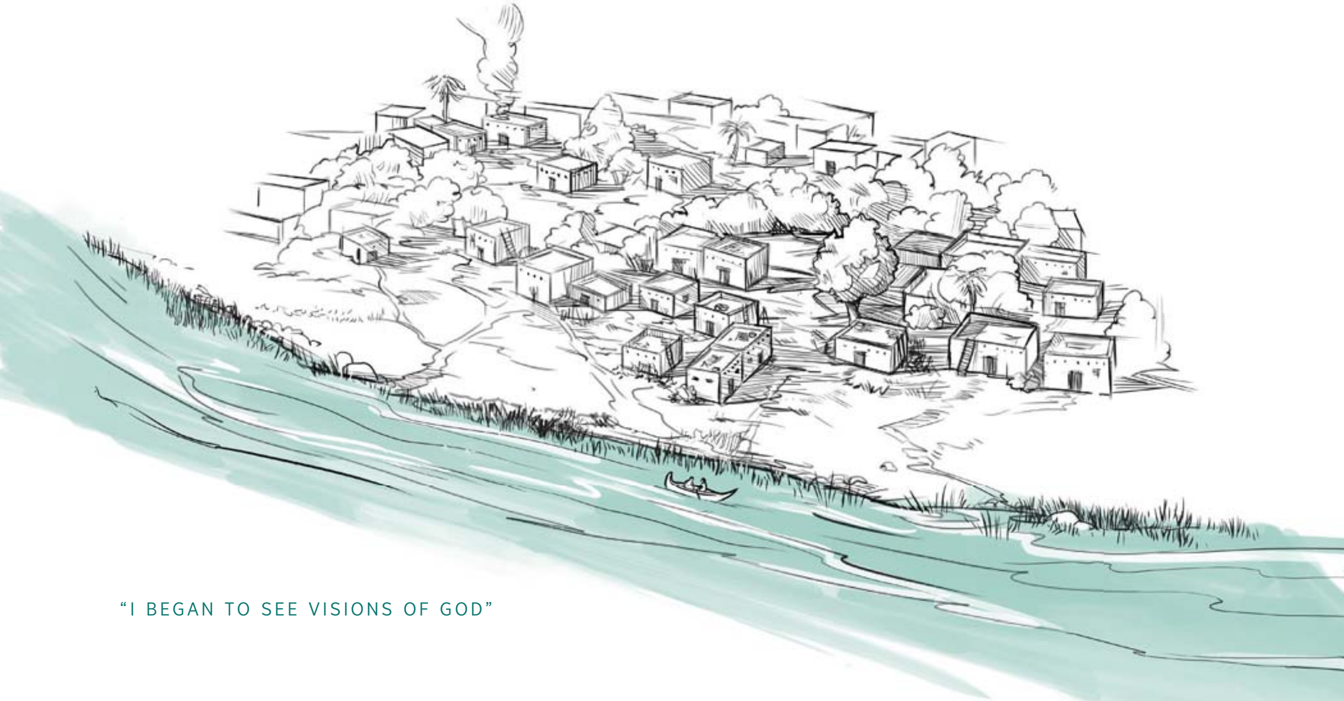
³ However, Jehovah has more in mind than simply filling this man with awe. Ezekiel's first vision—like the rest of those recorded in that thrilling prophetic book—is rich with meaning, both for him and for faithful servants of Jehovah today. So let us take a closer look at what Ezekiel sees and hears.

The Setting

⁴ **Read Ezekiel 1:1-3.** Let us first recall the setting. The year was 613 B.C.E. As we learned in the preceding chapter, Ezekiel was in Babylon, living among his fellow exiles in a community by the river Chebar—evidently a navigable, man-made canal that branched off from the river Euphrates and later rejoined it.

⁵ The exiles' home, Jerusalem, was some 500 miles away.[2] The temple, where Ezekiel's father had served as a priest, had fallen into corruption and idolatry. The throne in Jerusalem, where David and Solomon had once reigned in glory, was now a source of shame. Faithless King Jehoiachin was here in Babylon with the exiles. His replacement on the throne, Zedekiah, was a mere puppet and a wicked man.—2 Ki. 24:8-12, 17, 19.

⁶ For a man of faith like Ezekiel, these must have seemed the darkest of times. Some of his fellow exiles may have



Ezekiel lived among other exiles near the river Chebar
SEE PARAGRAPH 4

FOOTNOTE

[2] This was the direct distance, but the route the exiles had likely taken was nearly twice that distance.

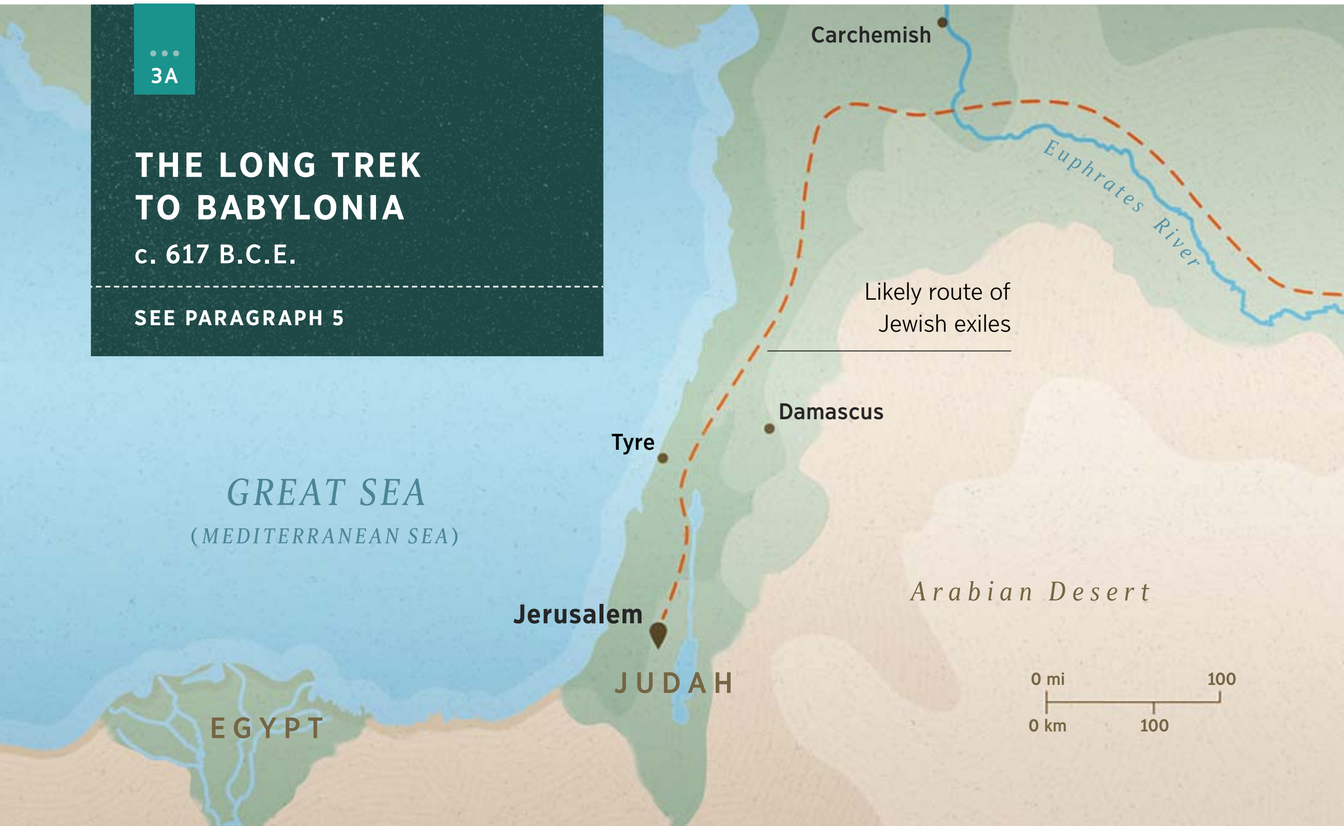
8. What did Ezekiel see in vision, and what did it represent?

wondered: 'Has Jehovah left us forever? Will this evil power Babylon with her countless false gods really banish the pure worship of Jehovah and eliminate his rulership from the earth?'

7 With that background in mind, why not begin your personal study of this subject by reading Ezekiel's vivid description of his first vision? (Ezek. 1:4-28) As you do, try to imagine yourself in Ezekiel's place, seeing what he saw and hearing what he heard.

A Vehicle Like No Other

8 Taken as a whole, what did Ezekiel witness? It looked like an immense, awe-inspiring vehicle, which has been described as a chariot. It included four tremendous wheels accompanied by four unusual spirit creatures, later identified as cherubs. (Ezek. 10:1) Above them stretched a vast platform, or expanse, like ice, above which sat the glorious throne of God, occupied by Jehovah himself! What, though, was the meaning of that chariot? Ezekiel's vision could fittingly represent only one thing: the heavenly part of Jehovah's glorious uni-



3A

THE LONG TREK TO BABYLONIA

c. 617 B.C.E.

SEE PARAGRAPH 5

Carchemish
Euphrates River
Likely route of Jewish exiles
Damascus
Tyre
GREAT SEA
(MEDITERRANEAN SEA)
Arabian Desert
Jerusalem
JUDAH
EGYPT
0 mi
100
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100

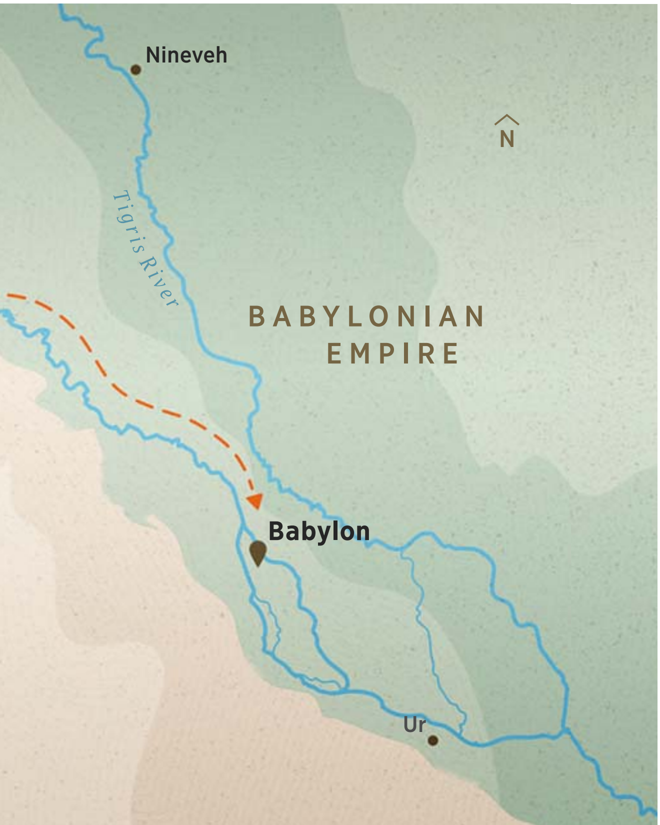
versal organization. Why do we say that? Consider three factors that lead to such a conclusion.

9 *Jehovah's relationship with his heavenly creatures.* Note that in this vision, Jehovah's throne is situated above the cherubs. In other parts of God's Word, Jehovah is similarly described or represented as sitting enthroned above or between his cherubs. **(Read 2 Kings 19:15;** Ex. 25:22; Ps. 80:1) Of course, he does not literally sit above his cherubs—as if he needs to be carried by those mighty spirit creatures—any more than he needs to ride on a literal chariot. But the cherubs support his sovereignty, and he can send them to any spot in the universe to carry out his sovereign will. They, like all of God's holy angels, carry out Jehovah's decisions as his ministers, or agents. (Ps. 104:4) In that sense, Jehovah "rides" upon them all, directing them with his sovereign rule, as if they comprise one huge, unified vehicle.

10 *The vehicle represents more than the cherubs.* The cherubs that Ezekiel saw numbered four. That number is often used in the Bible to suggest symmetry or completeness—an all-embracing universality. Fittingly, then, the presence of four

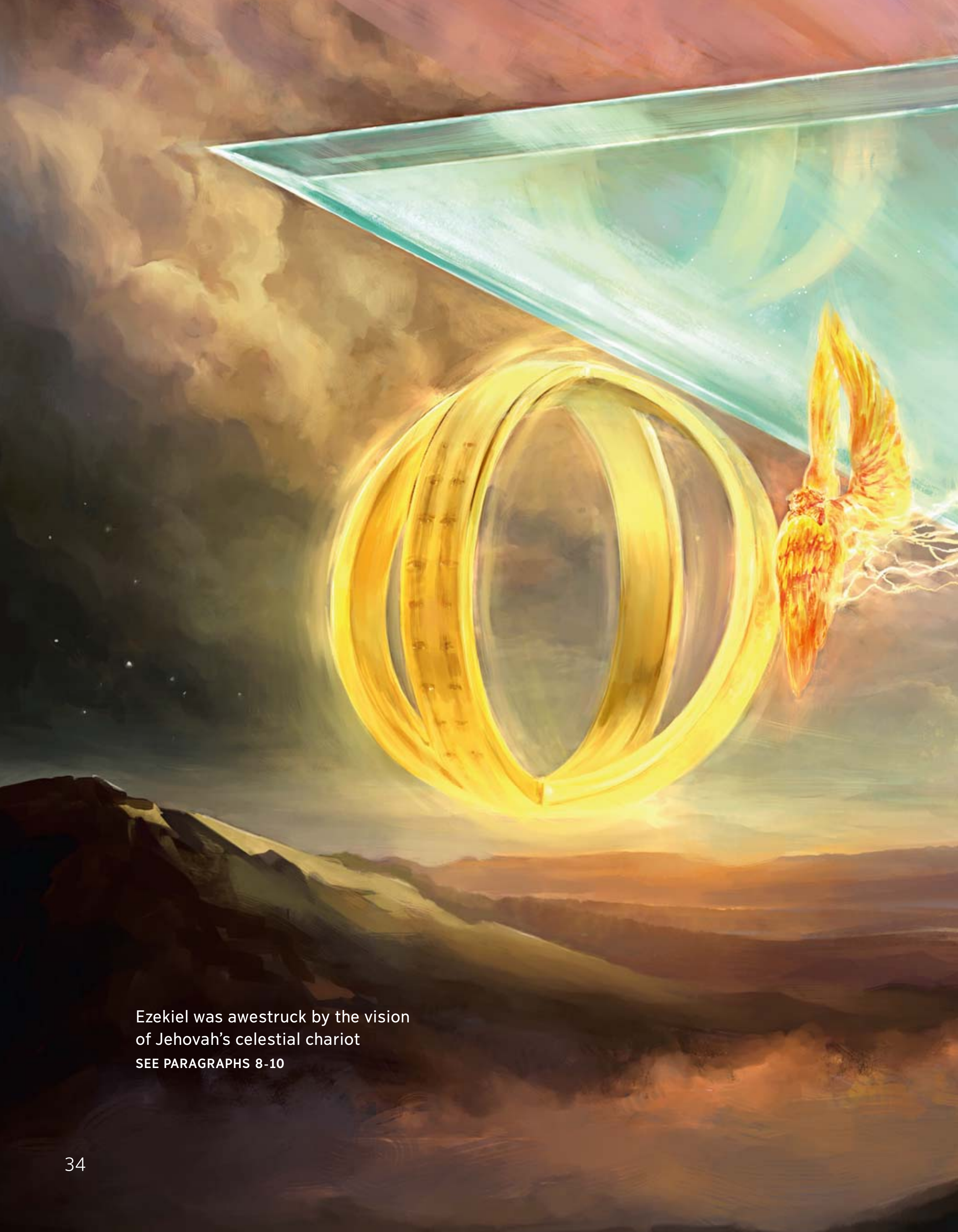
9. How does Jehovah's relationship with his heavenly creatures match the description of a vehicle?

10. What suggests that more than four cherubs are involved with the heavenly chariot?

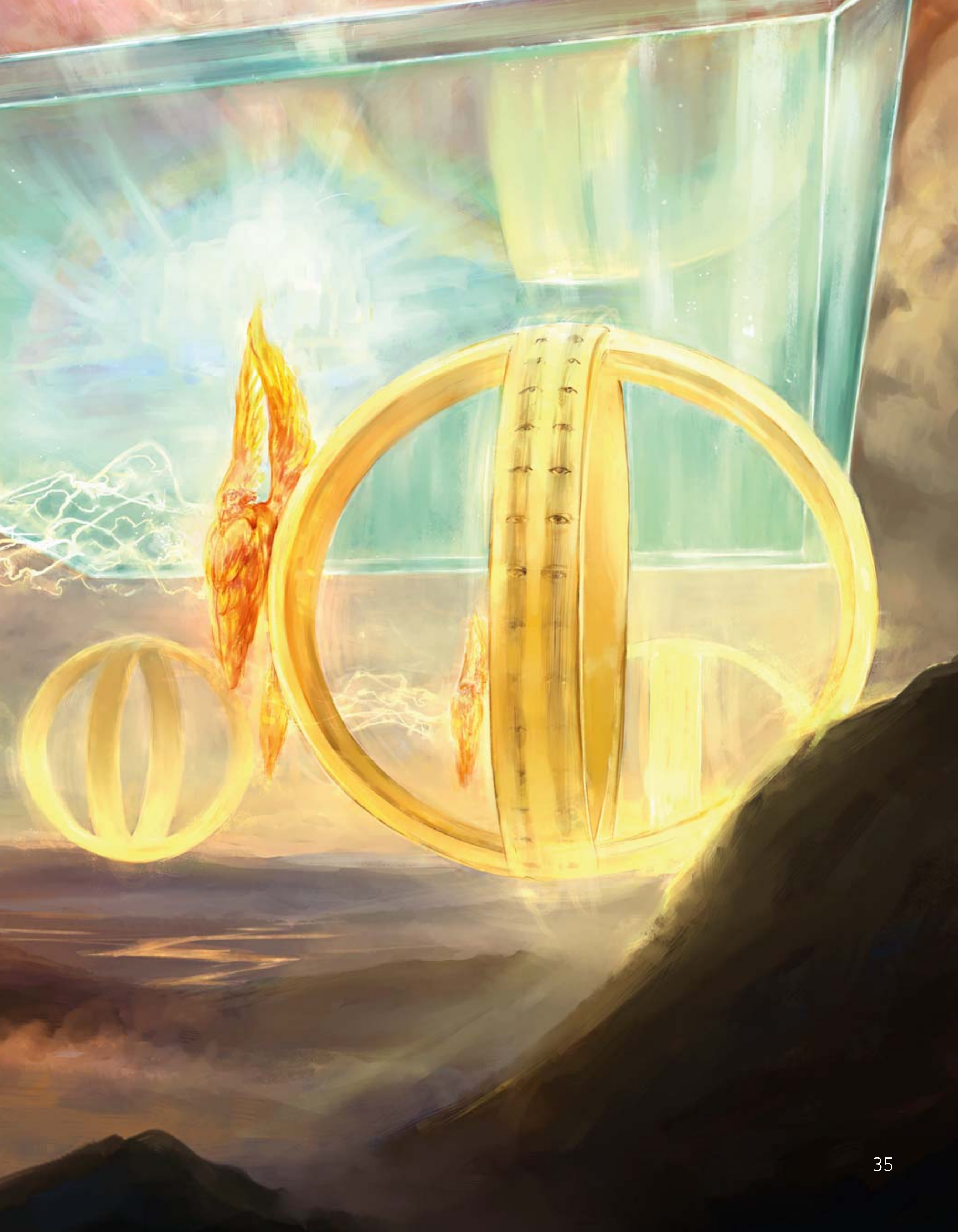


Euphrates River in the region near Carchemish

SEE PARAGRAPHS 5-7



Ezekiel was awestruck by the vision
of Jehovah's celestial chariot
SEE PARAGRAPHS 8-10



11. What similar vision did Daniel have, and what are we led to conclude?

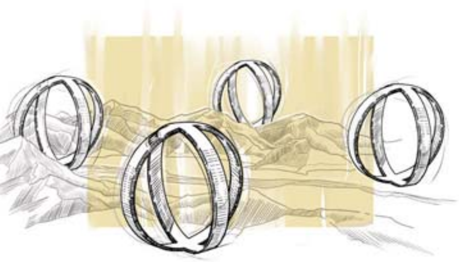
12. Why is it a protection for us to study such passages as Ezekiel's vision of the celestial chariot?

13, 14. (a) How did Ezekiel describe the wheels that he saw? (b) Why is it fitting that Jehovah's chariot has wheels?

cherubs suggests that *all* of Jehovah's loyal spirit sons are represented. Note, too, that the wheels and even the cherubs themselves are full of eyes, suggesting the watchful alertness of many more than just the four spirit creatures shown. And Ezekiel's description of the vehicle implies that it is immense, making even those impressive cherubs look small. (Ezek. 1:18, 22; 10:12) Likewise, the heavenly part of Jehovah's organization is vast, encompassing far more than four cherubs.

11 *Daniel's similar vision of heaven.* The prophet Daniel lived out the long years of exile in the city of Babylon, and he too was given a vision of heaven. Interestingly, in that vision as well, Jehovah's throne had wheels. Daniel's vision focused on the immensity of Jehovah's spirit family in heaven. Daniel saw "a thousand thousands . . . and ten thousand times ten thousand" of God's spirit sons standing before Jehovah. They sat as a celestial Court, each individual evidently in his own assigned place. (Dan. 7:9, 10, 13-18) Does it not seem reasonable to conclude that Ezekiel's vision represented this same glorious spirit assemblage?

12 Jehovah knows that it is a protection for us humans to focus our minds on spiritual realities—"the things unseen," as the apostle Paul called them. Why? Being flesh-and-blood creatures, we tend to dwell too much on "the things seen," our physical concerns, which are only temporary. **(Read 2 Corinthians 4:18.)** Satan often plays on that tendency and pushes us toward becoming fleshly-minded people. To help us resist that pressure, Jehovah lovingly provides us with such passages as this one in Ezekiel's prophecy, giving us thrilling reminders of the awesome majesty of Jehovah's celestial family!


The wheels were of awesome size and moved at tremendous speed
SEE PARAGRAPH 17

"Wheelwork!"

13 At first, Ezekiel focused his attention on the four cherubs, and in Chapter 4 of this publication, we will see what those creatures and their remarkable form teach us about Jehovah. However, Ezekiel saw the four wheels right alongside those cherubs, evidently at four points, forming a huge square. **(Read Ezekiel 1:16-18.)** They seemed to be composed of chrysolite, a precious stone that may be transparent or translucent and yellow or yellowish-green in color. This beautiful material glowed.

14 Ezekiel's vision placed great emphasis on the chariot's wheels. It is an unusual combination, is it not? A throne with wheels! We might tend to think of a throne as being fixed to one spot and naturally so, for earthly monarchs can extend their influence only so far. But Jehovah's sovereignty is quite unlike any human rulership. As Ezekiel was about to learn, there are no limits to Jehovah's sovereign power. (Neh. 9:6) In a very real sense, this Sovereign can exert his authority anywhere!

15 Ezekiel was awestruck by the size of the wheels. He wrote: "Their rims were so high that they inspired awe." We may imagine Ezekiel tilting his head back to gaze at the colossal, glowing rims stretching up toward the sky. And he added this intriguing detail: "The rims of all four [wheels] were full of eyes all around." Perhaps most fascinating of all, though, was the unusual structure of the wheels. He explained: "Their appearance and structure looked as though a wheel were within a wheel." What did that mean?

16 Evidently, each wheel that Ezekiel saw was, in effect, two wheels combined, with one wheel set at right angles to the other and sharing the same vertical axis. That would explain why these wheels performed as Ezekiel described: "When they moved, they could go in any of the four directions without turning as they went." What do these wheels suggest about the heavenly vehicle Ezekiel saw?

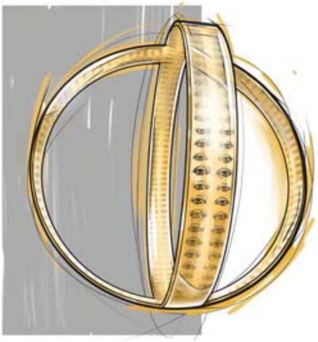
17 Wheels of such tremendous height would cover a lot of ground with even a single revolution. In fact, the vision suggests that the vehicle moved with the speed of lightning! (Ezek. 1:14) Furthermore, the unusual four-way wheels suggest a kind of maneuverability that human engineers can only dream of. This vehicle can shift directions without slowing down or even turning! But it does not make such moves blindly. The eyes covering the rims vividly convey the idea that this vehicle is completely aware of everything around it, in every direction.

18 What, then, was Jehovah teaching Ezekiel—and all faithful people—about the heavenly part of His organization? Consider what we have seen so far. *It is glorious and awe-inspiring,* as suggested by the glowing material of the wheels and their size. *It is aware of everything,* as suggested by the abundance of eyes on the wheels. Jehovah's own eyes see all things. (Prov. 15:3; Jer. 23:24) Furthermore, he has many millions of angelic servants whom he may send to any part of the universe, and these can observe matters keenly and report back to their Sovereign.—**Read Hebrews 1:13, 14.**

15. What did Ezekiel notice regarding the composition and size of the wheels?

16, 17. (a) In what sense did the chariot have wheels within wheels? (b) What do the wheels reveal about the maneuverability of Jehovah's vehicle?

18. What do we learn from the awesome size of the wheels and the abundance of eyes?



The design of the wheels indicated perfect maneuverability

SEE PARAGRAPHS 17, 19

19. What does the speed and maneuverability of Jehovah's chariot teach us about Jehovah and the heavenly part of his organization?

20. Why should we be in awe of Jehovah's chariot?

21, 22. How might we explain what holds the chariot's parts in place?

19 Further, we see that *the chariot is supremely fast and maneuverable*. Just think of the contrast between the heavenly part of Jehovah's organization and human governments, institutions, and organizations! Those tend to blunder along blindly, failing to adapt to changing circumstances until they plunge into catastrophe or become outdated. But Jehovah's chariot perfectly reflects the reasonable, adaptable God who is in control of it. As his very name suggests, he can become anything that is needed in order to accomplish his purpose. (Ex. 3:13, 14) For example, he can swiftly become a mighty Warrior who fights for his people, but he can instantly shift to being the merciful Forgiver of sins who nurtures and restores even the most brokenhearted of repentant sinners.—Ps. 30:5; Isa. 66:13.

20 Ezekiel's vision, at this point, may move us to ask ourselves, 'Am I really in awe of Jehovah's chariot?' We need to remember that the chariot represents a reality that exists right now. Never should we imagine that Jehovah, his Son, and all the angels might be blind to some problem that discourages us. Nor should we worry that our God will be late in responding to our needs or that his organization will fail to adapt to some new challenge arising in the volatile world around us. We do well to remember that Jehovah's organization is active, ever on the move. In fact, Ezekiel heard a heavenly voice crying out: "Wheelwork!"—evidently a command for the wheels to set themselves in motion. (Ezek. 10:13) Is it not awesome to contemplate the way Jehovah moves his organization? Our greatest awe, though, we reserve for Jehovah himself.

Ezekiel had to find words for sights that were almost beyond description

The One in Control

21 Ezekiel's attention was drawn from those wheels upward, where he saw "the likeness of an expanse that sparkled like awesome ice." (Ezek. 1:22) Far above the heads of the cherubs, the expanse stretched out, glistening in translucent glory. At this point, though, the mechanically inclined reader might be full of questions about the vehicle. For example, some might wonder: 'What holds that platform up above the wheels? And how can the wheels function without axles to join them together?' Keep in mind that this vehicle is not bound by physical laws, for it is symbolic, a depiction of a reality in the spirit realm. Note, too, these key words: "The spirit operating on the living creatures was also in the wheels."

JW
BROADCASTING

The earthly part of Jehovah's organization is ever on the move

SEE PARAGRAPHS 28, 29

(Ezek. 1:20, 21) What spirit was operative on those cherubs and on the wheels?

23. What type of expressions does Ezekiel use to try to describe Jehovah, and why?

24, 25. (a) Of what does the rainbow surrounding Jehovah's throne remind us? (b) How have such visions sometimes affected men of faith?

22 Without question, it was Jehovah's holy spirit, the most powerful force in the universe. That active force holds this vehicle together, empowers it, and governs its perfectly synchronized movements. With that in mind, let us follow Ezekiel's gaze as it turns to the One in control of the chariot.

23 **Read Ezekiel 1:26-28.** Throughout his description of this vision, Ezekiel often uses such expressions as "appearance," "appeared to be," "resembled," and "something like." But in these verses, that tendency intensifies. He seems to be trying to find words for sights that were almost beyond description. He saw "what looked like a sapphire stone, and it resembled a throne." Can you imagine a throne carved from one huge, deep-blue sapphire? And there, seated on it, was a Personage. His "appearance resembled that of a human."

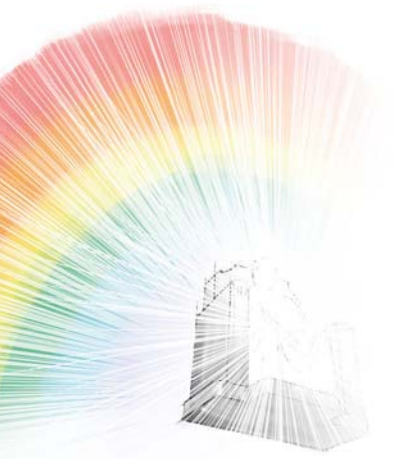
24 The majestic figure was discernible only in a general way, for Jehovah radiated flames of glory from the waist down and

26. How must Ezekiel's vision have strengthened him?

27. What meaning does Ezekiel's vision have for us today?

from the waist up. We may well imagine the prophet's needing to squint and to shade his eyes as he gazed at the glorious form. Finally, Ezekiel noted this crowning touch to the vision: "There was a brilliance all around him like that of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day." Have you ever felt your spirits lift when you caught sight of a rainbow? What a vivid reminder of the glory of our Creator! That colorful, serene arch in the sky may also remind us of Jehovah's covenant of peace after the Deluge. (Gen. 9:11-16) Powerful though he is, the Almighty is a God of peace. (Heb. 13:20) Peace reigns in his heart and spreads to all those who worship him faithfully.

25 What was the effect of seeing a depiction of the glory of Jehovah God? Ezekiel recorded what happened: "When I saw it, I fell facedown." Overcome with awe and godly fear, Ezekiel dropped to the ground. Other prophets had similar reactions on receiving visions from Jehovah; the experience must be deeply humbling, even overwhelming. (Isa. 6:1-5; Dan. 10: 8, 9; Rev. 1:12-17) In time, though, such men were greatly strengthened by what Jehovah revealed to them. Ezekiel surely was. How, then, should we be affected when reading Scriptural accounts such as these?



The glorious rainbow surrounding Jehovah's throne reminds us that we serve the God of peace
SEE PARAGRAPH 24

26 If Ezekiel was troubled by any doubts or misgivings about the situation of God's people there in Babylon, that vision must have strengthened him. Clearly, it did not matter whether God's faithful people were in Jerusalem or in Babylon or anywhere else. They would never be outside the reach of Jehovah's magnificent chariot! What satanic power could ever stand up against the God who is in control of such a glorious celestial organization? **(Read Psalm 118:6.)** Ezekiel saw, too, that the heavenly vehicle was not far removed from mankind. Why, its wheels touched the very earth! (Ezek. 1:19) So Jehovah was keenly interested in his faithful people there in exile. They would always be within the reach of their Father's loving care!

The Chariot and You

27 Does Ezekiel's vision have meaning for us today? Without question! Remember, Satan is mounting ever greater attacks on the pure worship of Jehovah. He would love to convince us that we are alone, isolated, beyond the reach of our heavenly Father and his organization. Never give such lies a foothold in your mind or heart! (Ps. 139:7-12) Like Ezekiel, we have every reason to be filled with awe. We may not fall facedown as he did. However, should we not marvel and feel awestruck by the power, the speed, the maneuverability, the adaptability, and the sheer glory of the heavenly part of Jehovah's universal organization?

28 Remember, too, that Jehovah's organization has an earthly component. Granted, the earthly part is composed of imperfect humans. But think of what Jehovah has accomplished here on earth! All over the world, Jehovah has moved mere humans to do what they could never have done on their own. (John 14:12) Just leafing through the pages of the book *God's Kingdom Rules!* may remind us of the amazing scope of the preaching work over the course of the past century. We may also call to mind the strides that Jehovah's organization has made in educating true Christians, in securing legal victories, and even in using the latest technology to carry out God's will!

29 When we consider all that has been done regarding the restoration of pure worship during the last days of this corrupt system of things, it becomes ever clearer that Jehovah's chariot has been on the move. What an awesome privilege we have to be associated with this organization and to serve such a Sovereign!—Ps. 84:10.

30 Ezekiel's vision has more to teach us, though. In the following chapter, we will take a closer look at those four remarkable "living creatures," or cherubs. What can they teach us about our glorious Sovereign, Jehovah God?

28, 29. What shows that Jehovah's chariot has been on the move during the past century?

30. What will we consider in the next chapter?

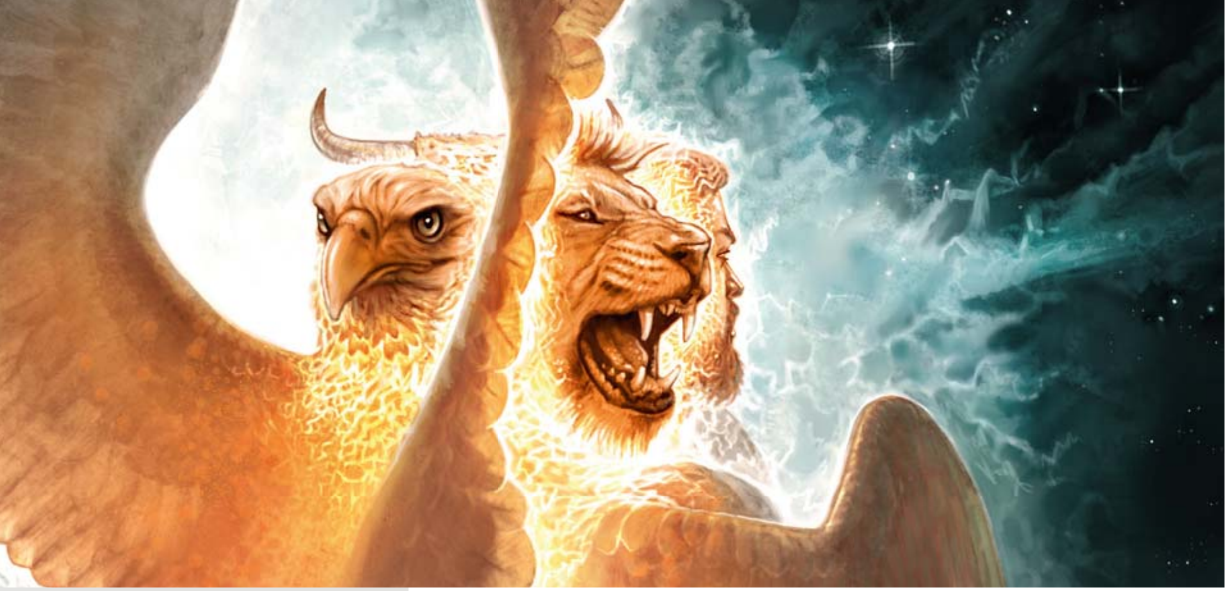
YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 What does the chariot that Ezekiel saw represent, and how do we know that?

2 What can we learn from the chariot's wheels and the way the vehicle moved?

3 How was Ezekiel affected by his vision, and how does meditating on it affect you?

4 How can we show that we are awed by the privilege of serving Jehovah along with his organization today?



4

WHO ARE "THE LIVING CREATURES WITH FOUR FACES"?

EZEKIEL 1:15

FOCUS: *The living creatures and what we learn from a study of them*

1, 2. Why did Jehovah, at times, use visual aids when conveying truths to his servants on earth?

IMAGINE a family with small children sitting around their kitchen table studying the Bible. To help the children understand a Scriptural truth, the father shows them some simple drawings. The children's smiles and animated comments indicate that the father is succeeding. By adding pictures to his words, he helps his children to grasp teachings about Jehovah that otherwise would be beyond their level of understanding.

2 Similarly, Jehovah has used visual aids to help his human children gain insight into unseen realities that they would not grasp otherwise. For example, to explain profound truths about himself, Jehovah showed Ezekiel a vision filled with striking images. In the preceding chapter of this publication, we considered one such image. Let us now focus on one specific part of that impressive vision and see how understanding its meaning can help us to draw closer to Jehovah.

“I Saw . . . What *Looked Like* Four Living Creatures”

³ **Read Ezekiel 1:4, 5.** Ezekiel describes “what looked like four living creatures” with angelic, human, and animal features. Notice how precisely Ezekiel recorded his impression, stating that he saw “what *looked like”* living creatures. As you read the entire vision found in Ezekiel chapter 1, you will note that the prophet repeatedly used such expressions as “looked like,” “was like,” “resembled.” (Ezek. 1:13, 24, 26) Clearly, Ezekiel realized that he saw mere likenesses, or images, of invisible realities that exist in heaven.

⁴ Ezekiel must have been awestruck by the vision’s sights and sounds. The appearance of the four living creatures was like “burning coals of fire.” Their fast movements resembled “flashes of lightning.” Their wings sounded “like a sound of rushing waters” and their movements, “like the sound of an army.” (Ezek. 1:13, 14, 24-28; see the box “I Was Watching the *Living* Creatures.”) In a later vision, Ezekiel identified these four living creatures as “cherubs,” or mighty angelic creatures. (Ezek. 10:2) Having been raised in a priestly family, Ezekiel no doubt knew that cherubs are closely associated with God’s presence and serve as His attendants.—1 Chron. 28:18; Ps. 18:10.

“Each One Had Four Faces”

⁵ **Read Ezekiel 1:6, 10.** Ezekiel also noted that each cherub had four faces—a face of a man, a lion, a bull, and an eagle. Seeing these four faces must have made a deep impression on Ezekiel about the surpassing greatness of Jehovah’s might and glory. Why so? Significantly, each face belonged to a creature that embodies majesty, strength, and mightiness. The lion is a majestic wild animal, the bull an impressive domestic animal, the eagle a mighty bird, and man the crowning achievement of God’s earthly creation, the ruler of all other creatures on earth. (Ps. 8:4-6) Nevertheless, in this vision, Ezekiel saw that all four mighty representatives of creation, as depicted by the four faces of each cherub, were situated below the throne of Jehovah, who is the Supreme Sovereign over all. What a fitting way to illustrate that Jehovah can use his creation to accomplish his purpose![1] Indeed, as the psalmist declares about Jehovah, “His majesty is above earth and heaven.”—Ps. 148:13.

⁶ After some time had passed and Ezekiel had reflected on what he had seen, he may have recalled that God’s servants who lived before his time had used animals in comparisons.

3. (a) According to Ezekiel 1:4, 5, what did Ezekiel see in vision? (See opening picture.) (b) What do you note about Ezekiel’s way of recording his impressions?

4. (a) What effect did the vision have on Ezekiel? (b) What did Ezekiel no doubt know about cherubs?

5. (a) How did the cherubs and their four faces reflect the greatness of Jehovah’s might and glory? (b) Why does this part of the vision remind us of the meaning of God’s name? (See footnote.)

6. What might have helped Ezekiel to understand what the four faces further represent?

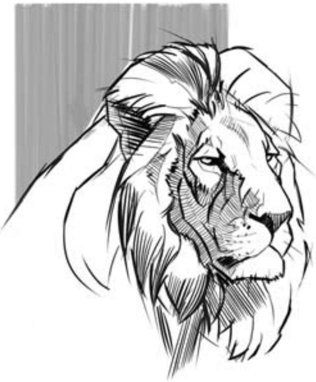
FOOTNOTE

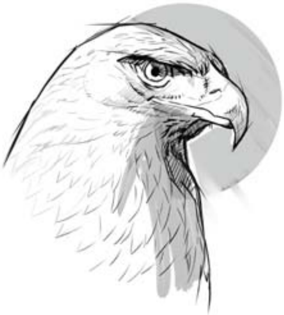
[1] Ezekiel’s description of these creatures reminds us of God’s name, Jehovah, which we understand to mean “He Causes to Become.” As one aspect of that name reveals, Jehovah can cause his creation to become whatever is needed to accomplish his purpose.—See Appendix A4 in the *New World Translation.*

7, 8. What attributes are often associated with the four faces of the cherubs?

9. To whom do the attributes associated with the cherubs' faces belong?

10, 11. What are some ways that we are benefiting from expressions of Jehovah's four cardinal attributes?





For instance, the patriarch Jacob had compared his son Judah to a lion and his son Benjamin to a wolf. (Gen. 49:9, 27) Why? Because the lion and the wolf picture characteristics, or attributes, that would stand out in these men's personalities. So with such examples from Moses' inspired writings in mind, Ezekiel may well have concluded that the cherubs' faces also pictured outstanding qualities or attributes. But which attributes?

Attributes Belonging to Jehovah and His Heavenly Family

7 With what characteristics did Bible writers who lived before Ezekiel's time associate the lion, the eagle, and the bull? Note these Bible phrases: "The courageous man whose heart is like that of a lion." (2 Sam. 17:10; Prov. 28:1) "An eagle flies upward," and "its eyes look far into the distance." (Job 39:27, 29) "The power of a bull yields an abundant harvest." (Prov. 14:4) Based on such scriptures, the lion's face pictures courageous justice; the eagle's face, far-seeing wisdom; the bull's face, irresistible power, as has often been stated in our publications.

8 But what about "the face of a man"? (Ezek. 10:14) It must refer to a quality that could be portrayed, not by any animal, but by humans, who are made in God's image. (Gen. 1:27) That quality—on earth, unique to humans—is highlighted by God's commands: "You must love Jehovah your God with all your heart" and "you must love your fellow man as yourself." (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18) When we obey these commands by showing unselfish love, we reflect Jehovah's own love. As the apostle John wrote, "we love, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:8, 19) Hence, "the face of a man" represents love.

9 To whom do these attributes belong? Since the faces belong to the cherubs, the attributes belong to all whom the visionary cherubs represent—Jehovah's heavenly family of loyal spirit creatures. (Rev. 5:11) Moreover, as Jehovah is the Source of the cherubs' life, he is also the Source of their attributes. (Ps. 36:9) Thus, the cherubs' faces picture attributes belonging to Jehovah himself. (Job 37:23; Ps. 99:4; Prov. 2:6; Mic. 7:18) What are a few ways in which Jehovah shows these outstanding attributes?

10 **Justice.** As the God who "loves justice," Jehovah "treats none with partiality." (Ps. 37:28; Deut. 10:17) Thus, the opportunity to become and remain his servants and to receive eternal blessings is open to all of us regardless of our social standing or background. **Wisdom.** As the God who "is wise in heart," Jehovah has provided a book full of "practical wisdom." (Job 9:4; Prov. 2:7) Applying the Bible's wise counsel helps us to deal with life's day-to-day challenges and to live meaningful lives. **Power.** As the God who is "great in power," Jehovah uses his holy spirit to give us "power beyond what is normal." This strengthens us to cope with whatever severe and painful trials we may face.—Nah. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:7; Ps. 46:1.

11 **Love.** As the God "abundant in loyal love," Jehovah never abandons his faithful worshippers. (Ps. 103:8; 2 Sam. 22:26) Thus, even if we are saddened because ill health or advanced age prevents us from doing as much in Jehovah's service as before, we draw comfort from knowing that Jehovah remembers the labors of love we have rendered to him in the past. (Heb. 6:10) Clearly, we already greatly benefit from Jehovah's expressions of justice, wisdom, power, and love, and we will continue to benefit from these four cardinal attributes in times to come.

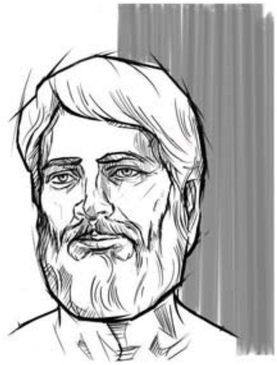
12 Of course, we should keep in mind that what we as humans are able to understand about Jehovah's qualities amounts to "just the fringes of his ways." (Job 26:14) "Understanding the Almighty is beyond our reach," for "his greatness is unsearchable." (Job 37:23; Ps. 145:3) Hence, we realize that Jehovah's qualities cannot be numbered or put into categories. **(Read Romans 11:33, 34.)** In fact, Ezekiel's vision itself reveals that God's attributes are not limited in number or in scope. (Ps. 139:17, 18) What aspect of the vision highlights that important truth?

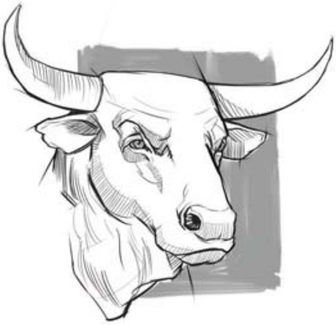
"*Four* Faces . . . *Four* Wings . . . *Four* Sides"

13 Ezekiel saw in vision that each of the cherubs had, not one, but *four* faces. What does that indicate? Recall that in God's Word, the number four is often used to represent that which is fully rounded out, all embracing, or complete. (Isa. 11:12; Matt. 24:31; Rev. 7:1) Significantly, in this particular vision, Ezekiel mentions the number four no less than 11 times! (Ezek. 1:5-18) What, then, can we conclude? Just as the *four* cherubs represent *all* other loyal spirit creatures, so the *four* faces of the cherubs *when viewed together* stand for, or embrace, *all* the attributes that Jehovah possesses.[2]

12. What should we keep in mind about our ability to understand Jehovah's qualities?

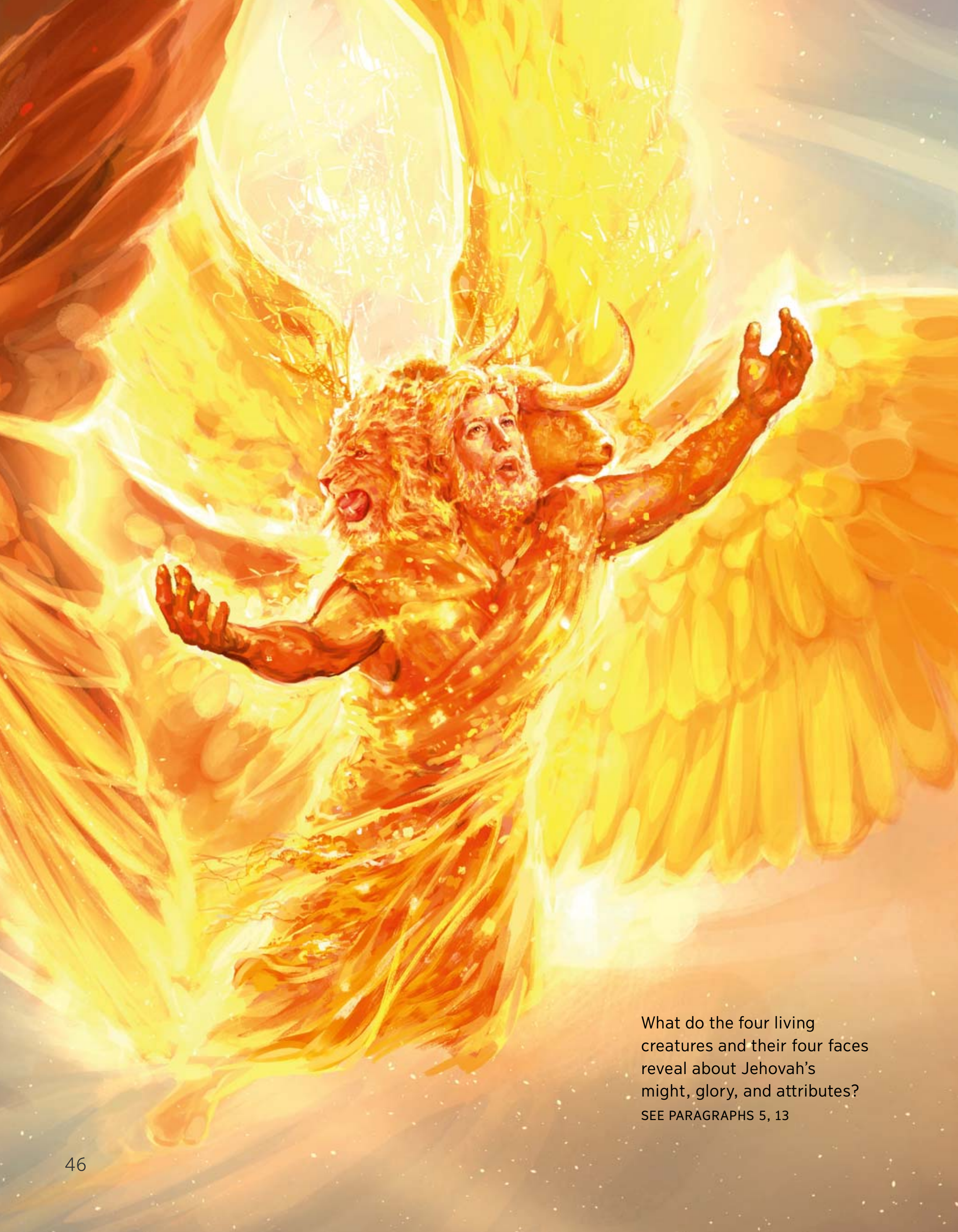
13, 14. What do the four faces of the cherubs represent, and why can we draw that conclusion?





FOOTNOTE

[2] Through the years, our publications have considered some 50 different attributes of Jehovah.—See the *Watch Tower Publications Index* under "Jehovah," subheading "Qualities by Name."



What do the four living creatures and their four faces reveal about Jehovah's might, glory, and attributes?
SEE PARAGRAPHS 5, 13

4A

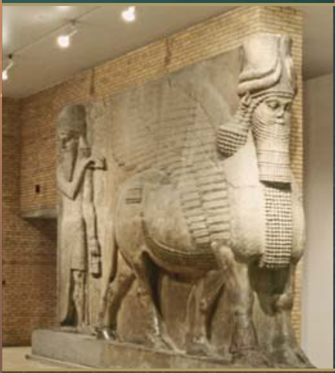
“I WAS WATCHING THE *LIVING* CREATURES”

SEE PARAGRAPH 4

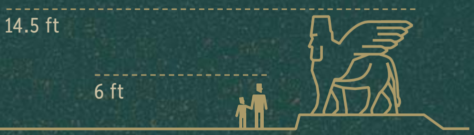
Ezekiel had no doubt seen colossal sculptures of winged bulls and lions with human heads standing as guardians in front of palaces and temples. Such statues were found throughout ancient Assyria and Babylonia. Like all onlookers, he must have stared in wonder at these formidable creatures, some standing nearly 20 feet tall. Still, no matter how powerful these creatures looked, they were lifeless, carved from stone.

In contrast, the four creatures that Ezekiel saw in vision were *“living* creatures.” What a striking difference! This sight had such an impact on Ezekiel that he mentioned the words *“living* creatures” 11 times in the introduction of his prophecy. (Ezek. 1:5-22) The vision of the four living creatures moving in unison below God’s throne must have deeply impressed on Ezekiel that Jehovah is in full control of all creation. Today, the same vision vividly impresses us with the greatness and mightiness of Jehovah and the magnificence of his sovereignty.—1 Chron. 29:11.

HUMAN-HEADED WINGED BULL



This carved sculpture of a human-headed winged bull was part of a gateway in the wall of the ancient Assyrian city of Khorsabad. The statue was intended to keep evil from entering the city.



We are never beyond the reach of Jehovah's loyal love

SEE PARAGRAPH 16

14 To illustrate how the meaning of the cherubs' four faces may include more than just four qualities, consider as a comparison what takes place with the four wheels in this vision. Each wheel is impressive, but when the four wheels are viewed together, they form more than four impressive individual wheels—they are the foundation on which the chariot rests. In a similar way, when the four faces are viewed together, they form more than four impressive individual attributes—they are the foundation of Jehovah's awe-inspiring personality.

Jehovah Is Close to All His Loyal Servants

15. What heartening truth did Ezekiel learn through the first vision he received?

15 Through this first vision, Ezekiel learned a vital and heartening truth about his relationship with Jehovah. What was it? That truth is indicated in the opening words of the prophet's book. After stating that he was "in the land of the Chaldeans," Ezekiel, speaking about his own experience, added: "*There* the hand of Jehovah came upon him." (Ezek. 1:3) Note that Ezekiel stated that he received the vision, not in

Jerusalem, but *there*—in Babylon.[3] So, what did that fact reveal to Ezekiel? This: Although he was a lowly exile who had been separated from Jerusalem and its temple, he had not been separated from Jehovah and His worship. Jehovah's appearing to Ezekiel in Babylon demonstrated that rendering pure worship to God did not depend on location or position. Instead, it depended on Ezekiel's heart condition and his desire to serve Jehovah.

16 Why is the truth that Ezekiel learned of great comfort to us today? It assures us that when we serve Jehovah wholeheartedly, he remains close to us no matter where we may live, how distressed we may feel, or under what circumstances in life we may find ourselves. (Ps. 25:14; Acts 17:27) Jehovah, moved by his abundant loyal love for each of his servants, does not quickly give up on us. (Ex. 34:6) Therefore, we are never beyond the reach of Jehovah's loyal love. (Ps. 100:5; Rom. 8:35-39) Furthermore, this impressive vision of Jehovah's holiness and his surpassing might reminds us that Jehovah is worthy of receiving our worship. (Rev. 4:9-11) Indeed, how thankful we are that Jehovah used such visions as aids to help us understand some important truths about himself and his attributes! Gaining deeper insight into Jehovah's appealing attributes draws us closer to him and moves us to praise and serve him with all our heart and all our strength. —Luke 10:27.

17 Sadly, though, in Ezekiel's day, pure worship was defiled. How did that come about? How did Jehovah react? And what significance do those ancient events have for us today? These questions will be considered in the following chapters.

16. (a) What comforting assurance can we draw from Ezekiel's vision? (b) What moves you to serve Jehovah with all your heart?

17. What questions will we consider in the following chapters?

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 Why do the faces of a man, a lion, a bull, and an eagle especially reflect Jehovah's strength and mightiness?

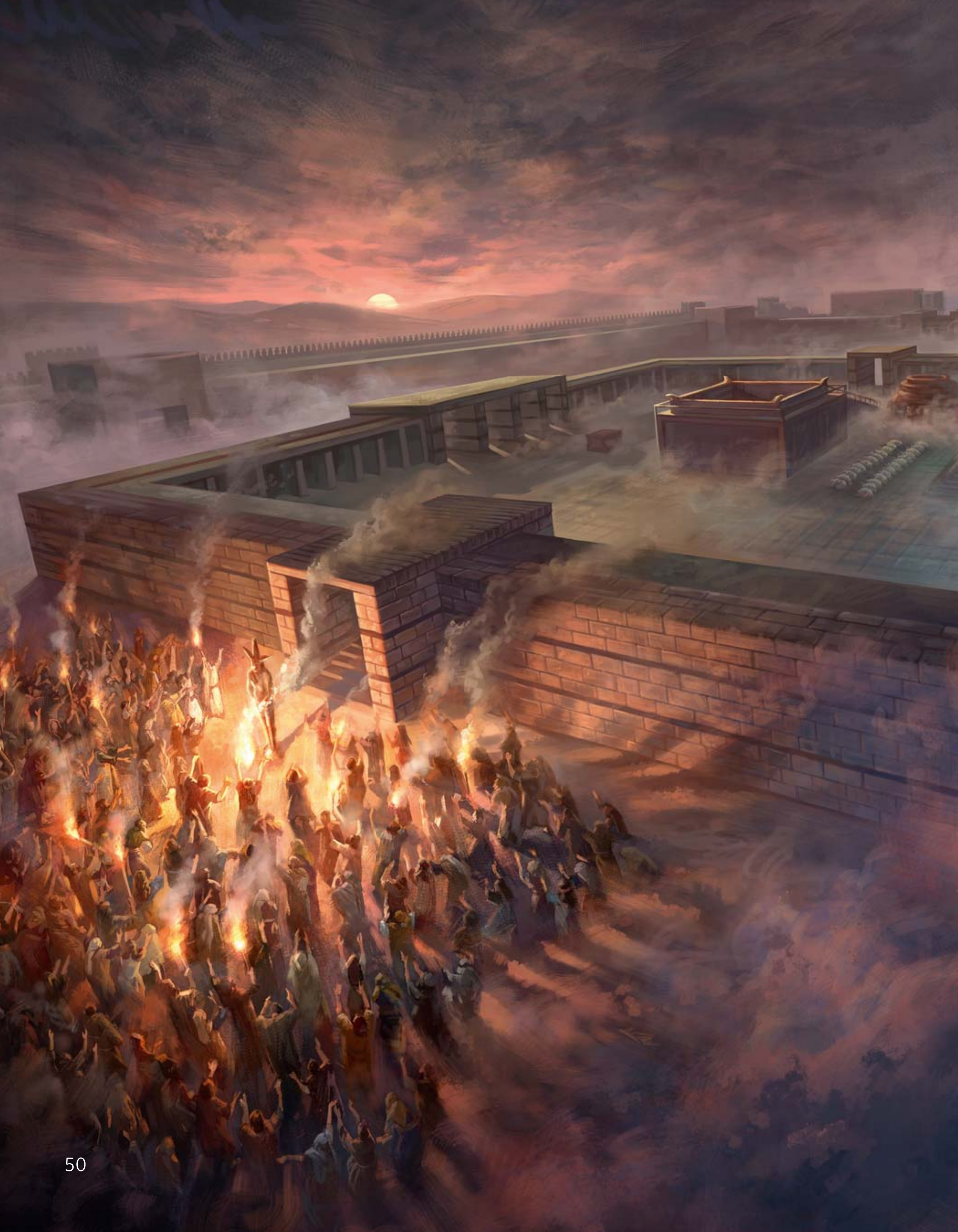
2 In what ways are you already benefiting from expressions of Jehovah's outstanding attributes?

3 Why can we conclude that the four faces of the cherubs when viewed together represent *all* of Jehovah's attributes?

4 How does this vision of Ezekiel assure you that you are never beyond the reach of Jehovah's love?

FOOTNOTE

[3] The single word "there," notes one Bible commentator, "captures the amazement of the moment more than any other. . . . God is *there* in Babylon! What comfort!"



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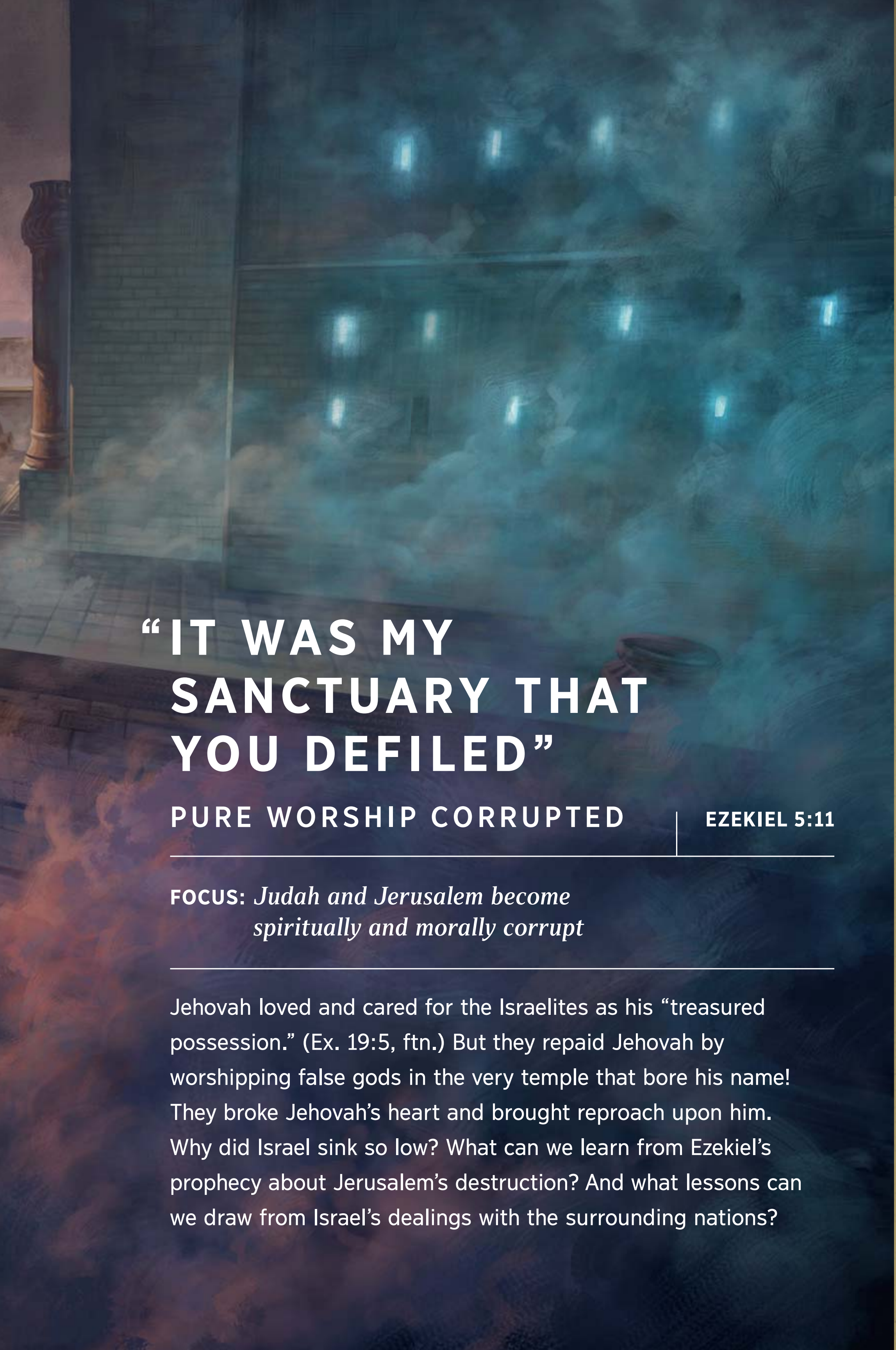
SECTION TWO



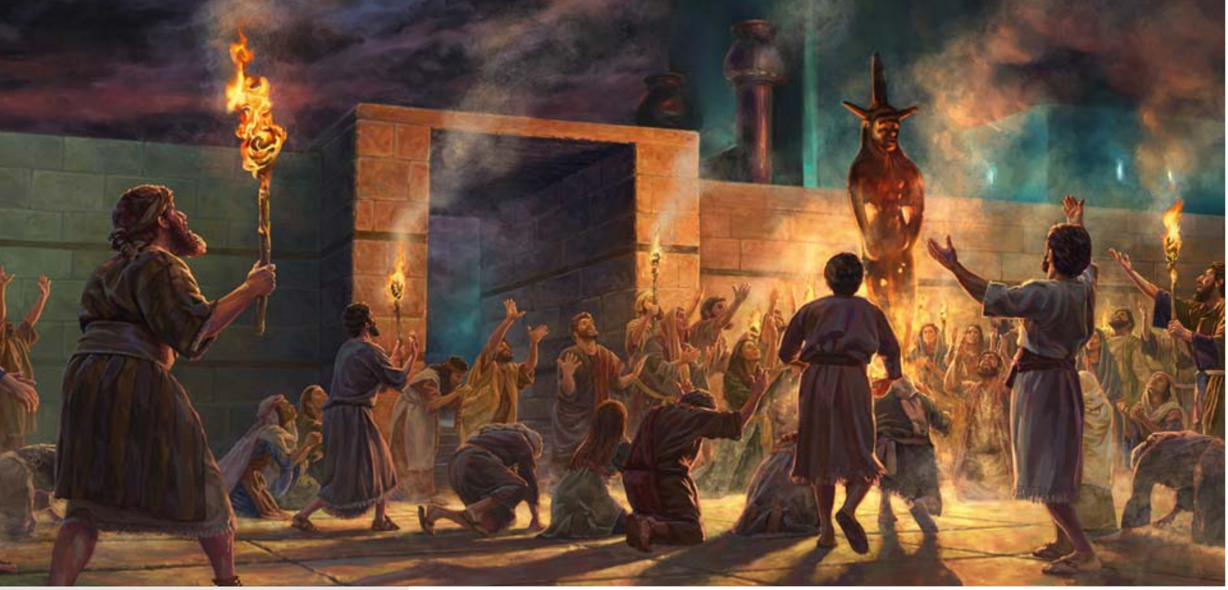
"IT WAS MY SANCTUARY THAT YOU DEFILED"

PURE WORSHIP CORRUPTED

EZEKIEL 5:11

FOCUS: *Judah and Jerusalem become spiritually and morally corrupt*

Jehovah loved and cared for the Israelites as his "treasured possession." (Ex. 19:5, ftn.) But they repaid Jehovah by worshipping false gods in the very temple that bore his name! They broke Jehovah's heart and brought reproach upon him. Why did Israel sink so low? What can we learn from Ezekiel's prophecy about Jerusalem's destruction? And what lessons can we draw from Israel's dealings with the surrounding nations?



5

“SEE THE EVIL, DETESTABLE THINGS THAT THEY ARE DOING”

EZEKIEL 8:9

FOCUS: *Apostate Judah’s spiritual and moral decline*

1-3. What did Jehovah want Ezekiel to see at the temple in Jerusalem, and why? (See Section 2 opening spread.)

AS THE son of a priest, the prophet Ezekiel is well-versed in the Mosaic Law. So he is familiar with the temple in Jerusalem and the pure worship of Jehovah that should be carried out there. (Ezek. 1:3; Mal. 2:7) But now, in 612 B.C.E., what is happening at Jehovah’s temple would shock any faithful Jew, including Ezekiel.

2 Jehovah wants Ezekiel to see the deplorable conditions at the temple and then to tell “the elders of Judah,” fellow Jewish exiles gathered in his house, what he sees. **(Read Ezekiel 8:1-4;** Ezek. 11:24, 25; 20:1-3) By means of holy spirit, Jehovah transports Ezekiel (in vision) from his house in Tel-abib, near the river Chebar in Babylon, hundreds of miles west to Jerusalem. Jehovah sets the prophet down in the temple, at the north gate of the inner courtyard. Starting here, Jehovah takes him, by means of a vision, on a tour of the temple.

3 Ezekiel now observes four shocking scenes that reflect the utter spiritual collapse of the nation. What has happened to the pure worship of Jehovah? And what meaning does this vision have for us today? Let us join Ezekiel on his tour. First, though, we need to consider what Jehovah rightly expects of his worshippers.

"I . . . Am a God Who Requires Exclusive Devotion"

4 Some nine centuries before Ezekiel's day, Jehovah clearly stated what he requires of his worshippers. In the second of the Ten Commandments, he told the Israelites:[1] "I, Jehovah your God, am a God who requires exclusive devotion." (Ex. 20:5) By the expression "exclusive devotion," Jehovah indicated that he would not tolerate the worship of any other gods. As we saw in Chapter 2 of this publication, the first requirement of pure worship is that the recipient of our religious devotion must be Jehovah. His worshippers have to give him the first place in their lives. (Ex. 20:3) Put simply, Jehovah expects his worshippers to keep spiritually clean by not mixing true worship with false. In 1513 B.C.E., the Israelites willingly entered into the Law covenant. By so doing, they agreed to give exclusive devotion to Jehovah. (Ex. 24:3-8) Jehovah is loyal to his covenants, and he expected similar loyalty from his covenant people.—Deut. 7:9, 10; 2 Sam. 22:26.

5 Was it reasonable for Jehovah to require exclusive devotion from the Israelites? Yes, indeed! He is Almighty God, the Universal Sovereign, and the Source and Sustainer of life. (Ps. 36:9; Acts 17:28) Jehovah was also the Israelites' Deliverer. When giving them the Ten Commandments, he reminded the people: "I am Jehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Ex. 20:2) Clearly, Jehovah deserved the exclusive place in the hearts of the Israelites.

6 Jehovah does not change. (Mal. 3:6) He has never wavered in his insistence on exclusive devotion. Imagine, then, how he must have felt about the four disturbing scenes that he now showed to Ezekiel in vision.

First Scene: The Idolatrous Symbol of Jealousy

7 **Read Ezekiel 8:5, 6.** Ezekiel must have been shocked! At the northern gate of the temple, apostate Jews were worshipping an idolatrous symbol, or image. It was perhaps a sacred pole representing Asherah, the false goddess that the

4. What does Jehovah require of his worshippers?

5, 6. Why did Jehovah deserve exclusive devotion from the Israelites?

7. (a) What were apostate Jews doing at the northern gate of the temple, provoking what reaction from Jehovah? (See opening picture.)
(b) In what sense was Jehovah incited to jealousy? (See footnote 2.)

FOOTNOTE

[1] In the book of Ezekiel, the term "Israel" is often used to refer to the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. —Ezek. 12:19, 22; 18:2; 21:2, 3.

8. What meaning does Ezekiel's vision of the symbol of jealousy have for our day?

9, 10. What warning lesson can we learn from the idolaters in the temple?

11. What disturbing things did Ezekiel see after entering the inner courtyard near the temple altar?

Canaanites viewed as the wife of Baal. Whatever it was, those idolatrous Israelites violated the terms of their covenant with Jehovah. By giving to an image the devotion that rightfully—and exclusively—belonged to Jehovah, they incited God to jealousy; they provoked him to righteous anger.[2] (Deut. 32:16; Ezek. 5:13) Just think: For over 400 years, the temple sanctuary had been associated with Jehovah's presence. (1 Ki. 8:10-13) But now, by bringing idolatry right into the temple area, those idolaters made Jehovah "go far away from [his] sanctuary."

8 What meaning does Ezekiel's vision of the symbol of jealousy have for our day? Apostate Judah certainly reminds us of Christendom. Idolatry is widespread in the churches of Christendom, which makes invalid any devotion that the people claim to give to God. Since Jehovah does not change, we can be sure that Christendom, like apostate Judah, has provoked his righteous anger. (Jas. 1:17) Surely, Jehovah is far away from this distorted form of Christianity!

9 What warning lesson can we learn from those idolaters in the temple? To render exclusive devotion to Jehovah, we must "flee from idolatry." (1 Cor. 10:14) We might think, 'I would never use images or symbols in my worship of Jehovah!' But idolatry comes in various forms, some more subtle than others. One Bible reference work puts it this way: "One may think of idolatry as a metaphor for other goods—anything of value, worth, or power that becomes our ultimate concern to the exclusion of God." Idolatry, then, can include material possessions, money, sex, entertainment—really, anything that could take first place in our lives and thus replace the exclusive devotion that is due Jehovah. (Matt. 6:19-21, 24; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5) We must guard against every form of idolatry because Jehovah has exclusive claim to our hearts—and our worship!—1 John 5:21.

10 The first scene that Jehovah showed Ezekiel involved "terrible, detestable things." Yet, Jehovah told his faithful prophet: "You will see detestable things that are even more terrible." What could be more terrible than the worship of that idolatrous symbol of jealousy in the temple area?

Second Scene: 70 Elders Offering Incense to False Gods

11 **Read Ezekiel 8:7-12.** Boring through a wall and entering the inner courtyard near the temple altar, Ezekiel now saw disturbing wall carvings of "creeping things and loathsome

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FOOTNOTE

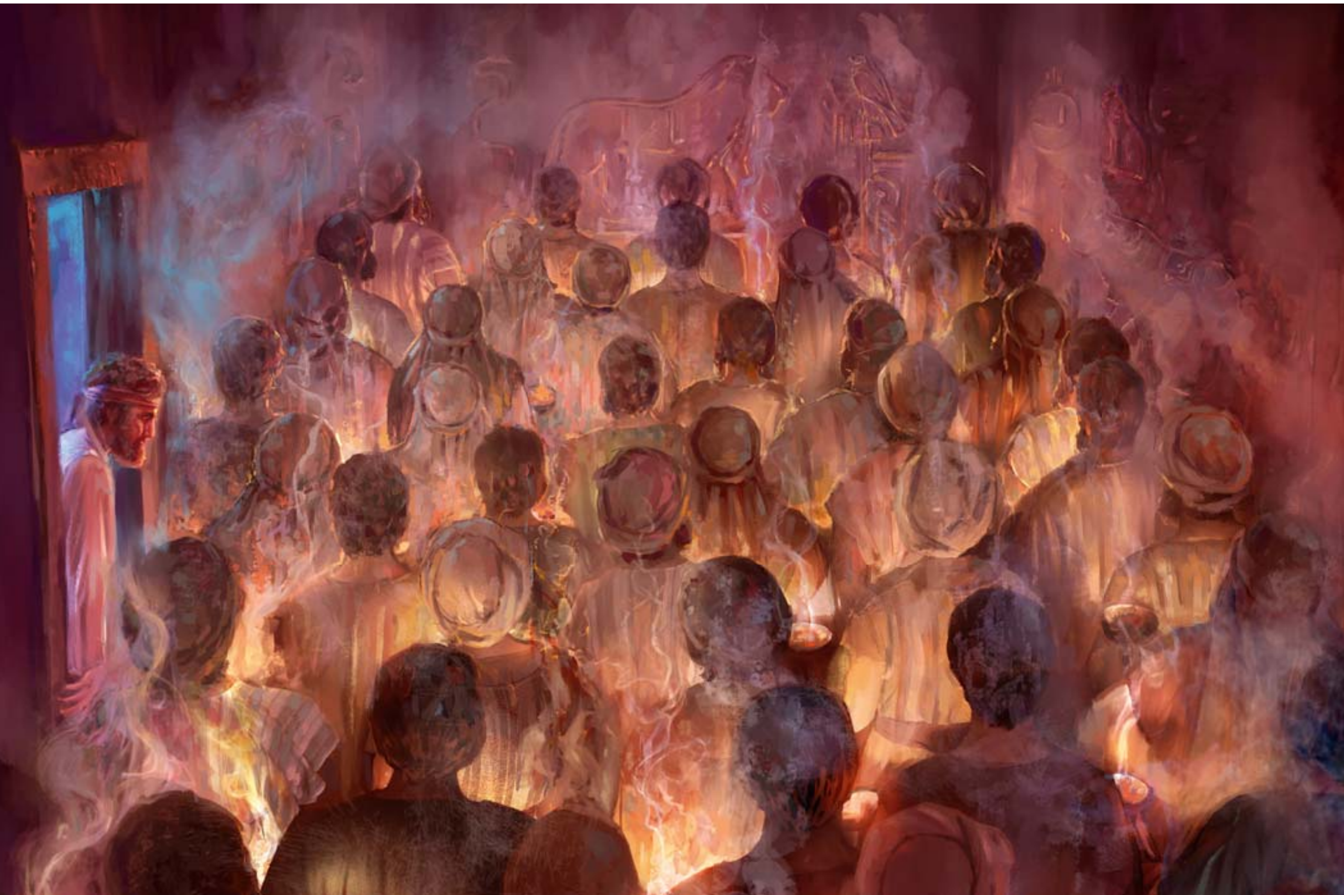
[2] The use of the term "jealousy" shows how seriously Jehovah views the matter of faithfulness to him. We may think of the jealous indignation a husband would feel if his wife were to become unfaithful. (Prov. 6:34) Like such a husband, Jehovah rightly became indignant when his covenant people proved unfaithful by taking up image worship. One reference work notes: "God's jealousy . . . proceeds from His holiness. Because He alone is the Holy One . . . , He will tolerate no rival."—Ex. 34:14.

beasts and all the disgusting idols."[3] Those wall carvings represented false gods. Even more disturbing is what Ezekiel saw next: "70 of the elders of the house of Israel" were standing "in the darkness" and offering incense to the false gods. Under the Law, the burning of sweet-smelling incense represented the acceptable prayers offered up by faithful worshippers. (Ps. 141:2) However, the incense that those 70 elders offered up to false gods was an unholy stench to Jehovah. Their prayers were like an offensive odor to him. (Prov. 15:8) Those elders fooled themselves into thinking: "Jehovah is not seeing us." But Jehovah did see them, and he showed Ezekiel exactly what they were doing in His temple!

12 What can we learn from Ezekiel's account of those 70 Israelite elders who offered incense to false gods? For our prayers to be heard by God—and to keep our worship pure in his eyes—we must remain faithful even "in the darkness." (Prov. 15:29) Let us keep in mind that Jehovah's all-seeing eyes are ever upon us. If Jehovah is real to us, we will not

12. Why must we remain faithful even "in the darkness," and who especially should set a good example in this regard?

Jehovah sees every detestable thing that is done "in the darkness"
SEE PARAGRAPH 11



FOOTNOTE

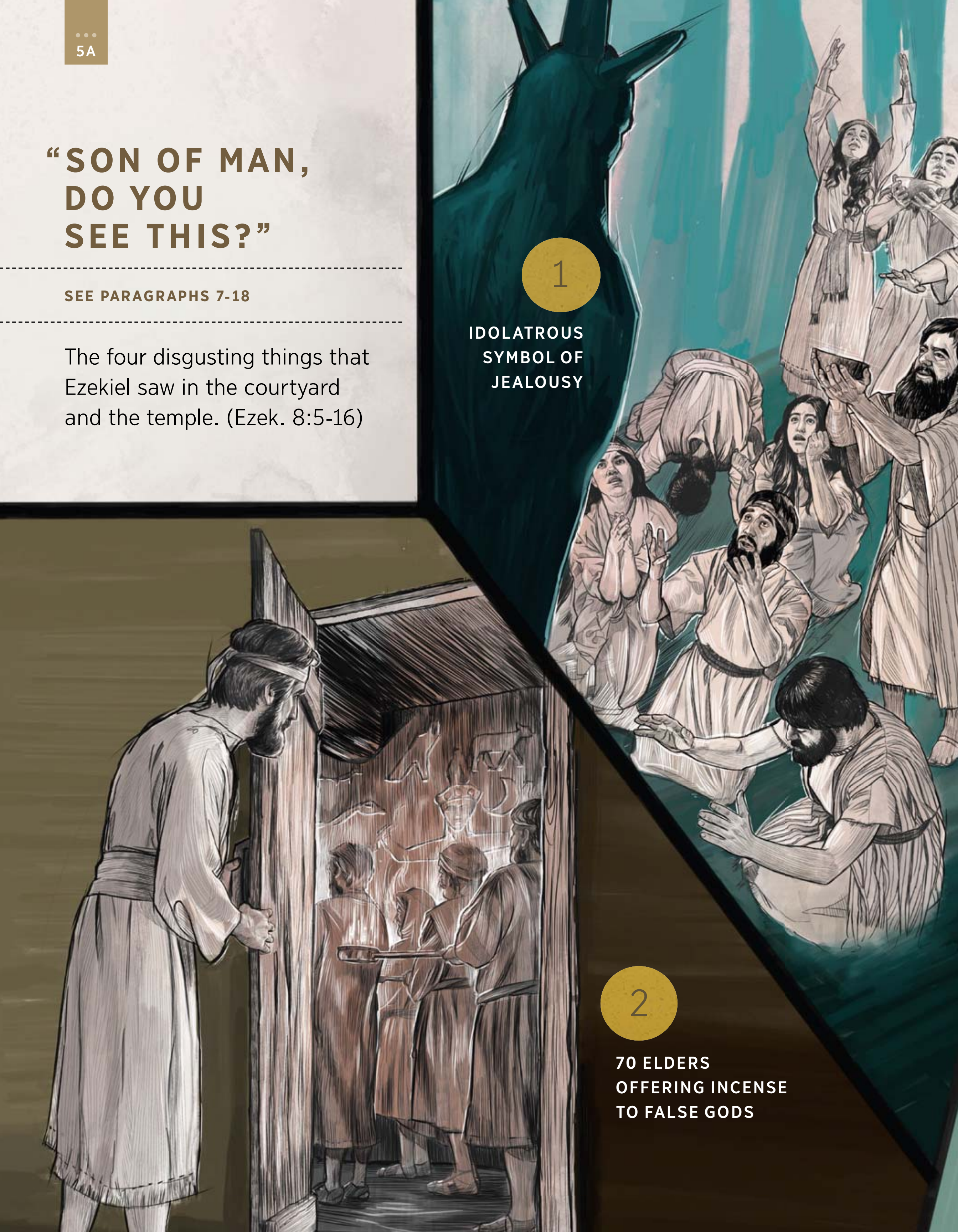
[3] The Hebrew term rendered "disgusting idols" may be related to a Hebrew word for "dung" and is used as an expression of contempt.

5A

“SON OF MAN, DO YOU SEE THIS?”

SEE PARAGRAPHS 7-18

The four disgusting things that Ezekiel saw in the courtyard and the temple. (Ezek. 8:5-16)

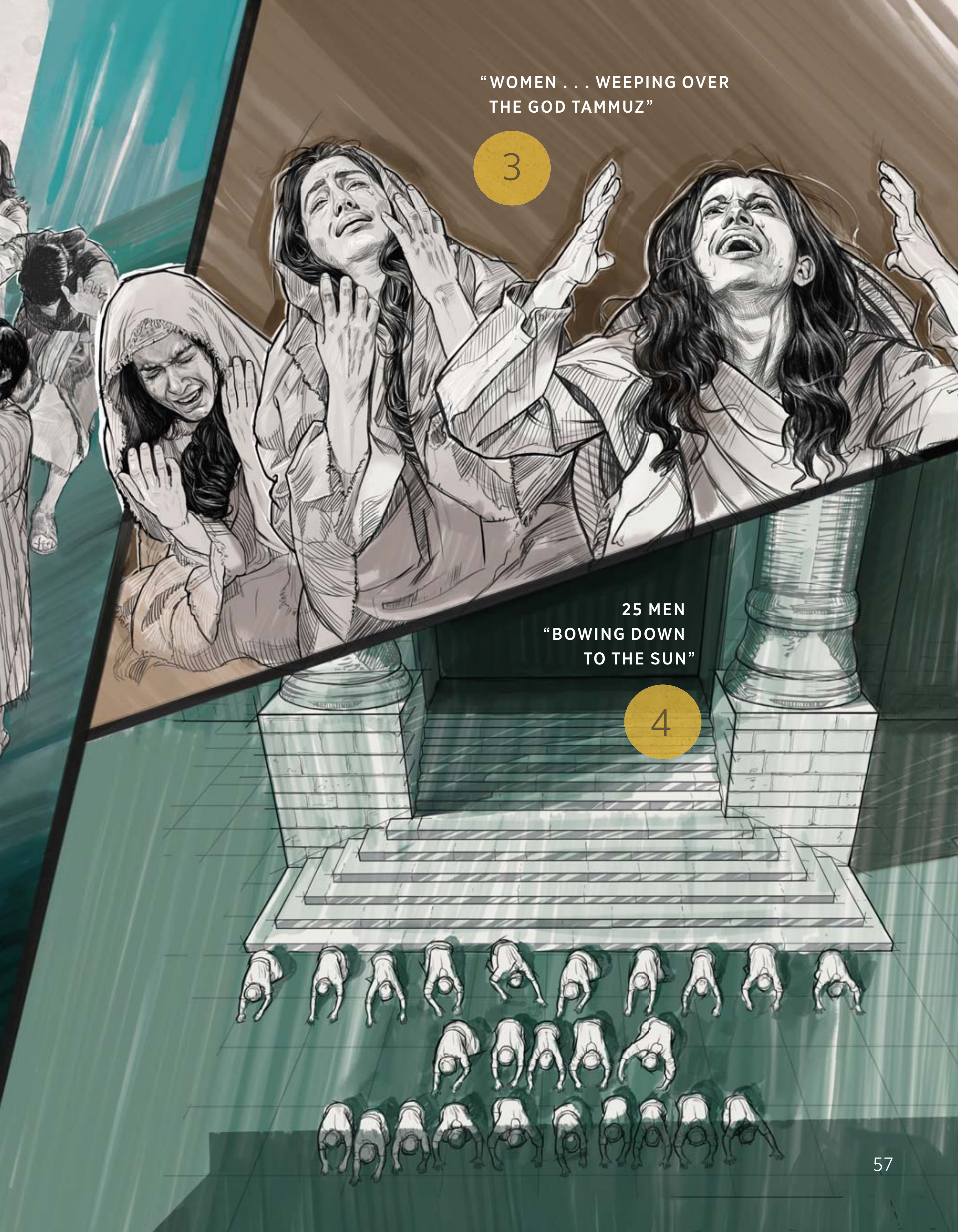


1

IDOLATROUS SYMBOL OF JEALOUSY

2

70 ELDERS OFFERING INCENSE TO FALSE GODS


“WOMEN . . . WEEPING OVER THE GOD TAMMUZ”
3
25 MEN “BOWING DOWN TO THE SUN”
4

do anything in private that we know is displeasing to him. (Heb. 4:13) Especially must congregation elders set a good example in Christian living. (1 Pet. 5:2, 3) Those in the congregation rightly expect that an elder who stands before them and leads them in worship at a meeting is living by Bible principles even “in the darkness,” that is, when others may not see him.—Ps. 101:2, 3.

Third Scene: “Women . . . Weeping Over the God Tammuz”

13 **Read Ezekiel 8:13, 14.** Following the first two scenes of detestable practices, Jehovah again told Ezekiel: “You will see detestable things that are even more terrible that they are doing.” What, then, did the prophet see next? At “the entrance of the north gate of the house of Jehovah,” he saw “women sitting and weeping over the god Tammuz.” A deity of Mesopotamia, Tammuz is called Dumuzi in Sumerian texts and is thought to have been the consort of the fertility goddess Ishtar.[4] The Israelite women were evidently weeping as part of some religious ritual connected with the death of Tammuz. By weeping over Tammuz in Jehovah’s temple, those women were carrying out a pagan ritual in a center for pure worship. But a false religious observance was not sanctified by being carried out in God’s temple. Why, from Jehovah’s standpoint, those apostate women were doing “detestable things”!

14 What lesson can we learn from Jehovah’s view of what those women were doing? To keep our worship pure, we must never mix it with unclean pagan practices. Hence, we must have nothing to do with observances that have pagan religious origins. Does origin really matter? Yes! Today the practices associated with certain observances, such as Christmas and Easter, may seem harmless. But let us not forget that Jehovah saw firsthand the pagan religious practices that eventually have become modern-day observances. In Jehovah’s view, pagan practices do not become less detestable with the passage of time or through efforts to mix them with pure worship.—2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:2, 4.

Fourth Scene: 25 Men “Bowing Down to the Sun”

15 **Read Ezekiel 8:15-18.** Jehovah introduced the fourth and final scene with the now familiar words: “You will see detestable things that are even more terrible than these.” Perhaps the prophet wondered: ‘What could be more terrible than the things I have already seen?’ Ezekiel was now in the

13. What did Ezekiel see apostate women doing at one of the temple gates?

14. What lesson can we learn from Jehovah’s view of what the apostate women were doing?

15, 16. What were 25 men doing in the inner courtyard of the temple, and why did their actions deeply offend Jehovah?

FOOTNOTE

[4] There is no factual basis for the claim that Tammuz is another name for Nimrod.

inner courtyard of the temple. There, at the entrance of the temple, he saw 25 men bowing down to worship "the sun in the east." Those men could hardly have found a way to offend Jehovah more deeply. How so?

16 Picture the scene: God's temple was built with the entrance facing east. Worshippers entering the temple would be facing west, with their backs to the rising sun in the east. But the 25 men in the vision turned their "backs to the temple" and faced east so that they could worship the sun. In so doing, they turned their backs on Jehovah, for that temple was "the house of Jehovah." (1 Ki. 8:10-13) Those 25 men were apostates. They ignored Jehovah, and they violated the command recorded at Deuteronomy 4:15-19. How they offended the God who rightly deserves exclusive devotion!

17 What can we learn from the account of those sun worshippers? To keep our worship pure, we must look to Jehovah for spiritual enlightenment. Remember, "Jehovah God is a sun," and his Word is "a light" for our path. (Ps. 84:11; 119:105) Through his Word and Bible-based publications from his organization, he illuminates our hearts and minds, showing us how to follow a course that leads to a satisfying life now and to everlasting life in the future. If we were to look instead to this world for enlightenment on how to live, we would be turning our backs on Jehovah. Such a course would deeply offend him, causing him much pain of heart. We would never want to do that to our God! Ezekiel's vision is also a warning for us to avoid those who turn their backs on the truth, namely, apostates.—Prov. 11:9.

18 As we have seen thus far, Ezekiel witnessed four shocking scenes of idolatry and false worship that revealed the depth of apostate Judah's spiritual defilement. By becoming spiritually unclean, those Israelites damaged the relationship between the nation and God. But spiritual uncleanness and moral defilement go hand in hand. Not surprisingly, then, the apostate Israelites committed all manner of moral wrongs that undermined not just their relationship with God but also their relationship with fellow humans. Let us now see how the prophet Ezekiel, under inspiration, described the moral decay of apostate Judah.

17, 18. (a) What lesson can we learn from the account of the sun worshippers in the temple? (b) The apostate Israelites damaged what relationships, and how?

19. How did Ezekiel describe the moral bankruptcy of Jehovah's covenant people?

Jehovah deserves exclusive devotion from his worshippers

Moral Uncleanness—"Obscene Conduct in Your Midst"

19 **Read Ezekiel 22:3-12.** The nation was morally corrupt from the rulers on down. "The chieftains," or leaders, used

Under Christendom's influence, the world sinks deeper and deeper into violence and immorality

SEE PARAGRAPH 20

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20. Why do Ezekiel's words about the moral uncleanness of Judah have meaning for our day?

their authority to shed innocent blood. The people in general evidently followed their leaders in disregarding God's Law. Within the family, children treated parents "with contempt," and incest was commonplace. Within the land, the rebellious Israelites defrauded the foreign resident and mistreated the fatherless child and the widow. Israelite men violated their neighbors' wives. The people gave way to unrestrained greed by practicing bribery, extortion, and usury. How it must have pained Jehovah to see his covenant people trampling on his Law and ignoring the loving spirit behind it! Jehovah took their moral bankruptcy personally. He directed Ezekiel to tell the immoral people: "You have entirely forgotten me."

20 Why do Ezekiel's words about the moral uncleanness of Judah have meaning for our day? The corruption in apostate Judah reminds us of the morally bankrupt world we live in today. Political rulers have abused their power and oppressed the common people. Religious leaders—in particular, the clergy of Christendom—have blessed the wars of the nations that have caused the loss of countless millions of lives. The clergy have watered down the Bible's pure and clear standards regarding sexual morality. As a result, the moral standards of the world around us keep sinking ever lower. Surely Jehovah would say to Christendom what he said to apostate Judah: “You have entirely forgotten me.”

21 What can we as Jehovah’s people learn from the moral uncleanness of ancient Judah? To worship Jehovah acceptably, we must keep our conduct clean in all respects. That is no small challenge in this morally corrupt world. (2 Tim. 3:1-5) However, we know how Jehovah feels about moral corruption in all its ugly forms. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10) We obey Jehovah’s moral standards because we love him and his laws. (Ps. 119:97; 1 John 5:3) To become morally unclean would be unloving toward our holy and clean God. We would never want to give Jehovah just cause to say to us: “You have entirely forgotten me.”

22 We have learned some valuable lessons from reviewing Jehovah’s exposé of the spiritual and moral decline of ancient Judah. Surely we are strengthened in our resolve to give Jehovah the exclusive devotion that he so richly deserves. To that end, we must guard against all forms of idolatry and keep morally clean. What, though, did Jehovah do about his unfaithful people? At the conclusion of Ezekiel’s temple tour, Jehovah plainly told his prophet: “I will act in rage.” (Ezek. 8:17, 18) We want to know what action Jehovah took toward unfaithful Judah, for a similar judgment will be executed on this wicked world. The next chapter will discuss how Jehovah’s judgments against Judah were fulfilled.

21. What can we learn from the moral uncleanness of ancient Judah?

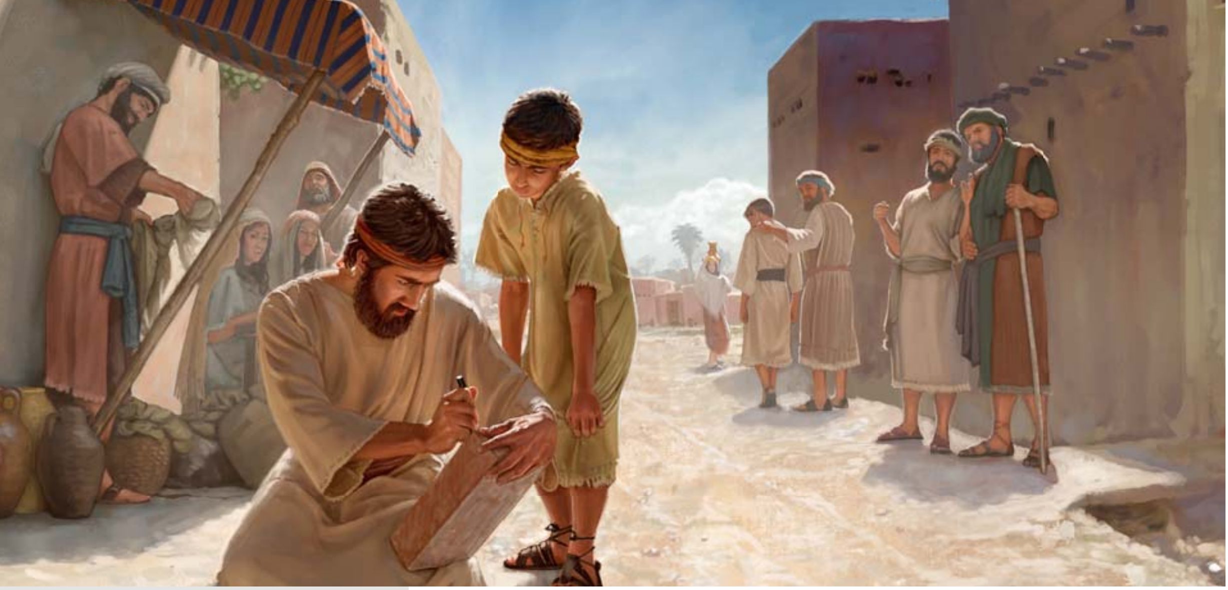
22. (a) After reviewing Jehovah’s exposé of ancient Judah, what are you resolved to do? (b) What will be discussed in the next chapter?

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 What does Jehovah rightly expect of his worshippers, and how can you live up to his expectation?

2 In what ways did the Israelites become spiritually unclean, but how can you keep spiritually clean?

3 Why are you determined to stay morally clean?



6

“THE END IS NOW UPON YOU”

EZEKIEL 7:3

FOCUS: *Jehovah’s prophetic judgments against Jerusalem—how fulfilled*

1, 2. (a) What puzzling behavior did Ezekiel engage in? (See opening picture.) (b) What did his actions foretell?

THE news about the prophet Ezekiel’s strange behavior spreads rapidly among the exiled Jews living in the land of Babylon. For a week, he had been sitting dazed and speechless among the exiles, but then, he suddenly got up and shut himself in his house. Now, with his perplexed neighbors looking on, the prophet reappears, picks up a brick, puts it in front of him, and etches it with a drawing. Then, without uttering a word, Ezekiel begins to build a miniature wall.—Ezek. 3:10, 11, 15, 24-26; 4:1, 2.

2 The spectators, no doubt growing in number, must have wondered, ‘What does all of this mean?’ Only later would those Jewish exiles fully grasp that the prophet Ezekiel’s puzzling behavior foretold the coming of a dreadful event that would express Jehovah God’s righteous indignation. What was that event? How did it affect the ancient nation of Israel? What significance does it have for pure worshippers today?

“Take a Brick . . . Take Wheat . . . Take a Sharp Sword”

3 In about 613 B.C.E., Jehovah instructed Ezekiel to demonstrate by signs three aspects of God’s coming judgment against Jerusalem. They were: the *siege* of the city, the *suffering* of its inhabitants, and the *destruction* of the city and its people.[1] Let us consider these three aspects in more detail.

4 **The siege of Jerusalem.** Jehovah told Ezekiel: “Take a brick and put it in front of you. . . . Lay siege to it.” **(Read Ezekiel 4:1-3.)** The brick represented the city of Jerusalem, while Ezekiel himself portrayed the Babylonian army as used by Jehovah. Ezekiel was also instructed to build a miniature wall and a siege rampart and to make battering rams. He was then to place these around the brick. They represented the instruments of war that Jerusalem’s enemies would use when surrounding the city and attacking it. To indicate the ironlike strength of the enemy soldiers, Ezekiel was to put “an iron griddle,” or plate, between himself and the city. He then set his “face *against”* the city. Those confrontational actions served as “a sign to the house of Israel” that the unthinkable was about to happen. Jehovah would use an enemy army to lay siege to Jerusalem, the chief city of God’s people, the location of God’s temple!

5 **The suffering of Jerusalem’s inhabitants.** Jehovah ordered Ezekiel: “Take wheat, barley, broad beans, lentils, millet, and spelt [a type of wheat] . . . and make them into bread,” and “weigh out and eat 20 shekels of food per day.” Jehovah then explained: “I am cutting off the food supply.” (Ezek. 4:9-16) In this scene, Ezekiel no longer represented the Babylonian army; rather, he took on the role of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The prophet’s actions foretold that the coming siege would cause the food supplies in the city to dwindle. At that time, bread would be made from an odd mixture of ingredients, which indicated that the people would have to eat whatever they found. How severe would the starvation become? As if directly addressing the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Ezekiel said: “Fathers among you will eat their sons, and sons will eat their fathers.” In the end, many would suffer because of “the deadly arrows of famine,” and the people would “waste away.”—Ezek. 4:17; 5:10, 16.

6 **The destruction of Jerusalem and its people.** In this part of the prophetic enactment, Ezekiel acted out two roles at the same time. First, Ezekiel acted out what Jehovah would do. Jehovah told him: “Take a sharp sword for yourself to use

3, 4. (a) What three aspects of God’s judgment did Ezekiel portray? (b) How did Ezekiel act out the siege of Jerusalem?

5. Describe how Ezekiel portrayed what would happen to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

6. (a) What two roles did Ezekiel act out at the same time? (b) What is indicated by God’s command to “weigh and divide the hair”?

FOOTNOTE

[1] It is reasonable to conclude that Ezekiel acted out all these signs before onlookers. Why? Because regarding some of the enactments, such as baking bread and carrying luggage, Jehovah commanded Ezekiel specifically to do these things *“before their eyes.”* —Ezek. 4:12; 12:7.

“THE END IS NOW UPON YOU” 63

7. Why did Jehovah tell Ezekiel to divide the hair in three portions and to treat each portion differently?

8. (a) What hint of hope did Ezekiel's enactment contain? (b) How did the prophetic statement about the "few strands" come true?

9, 10. What significant events foretold for our future do Ezekiel's prophetic enactments bring to mind?

as a barber's razor." **(Read Ezekiel 5:1, 2.)** Ezekiel's hand that wielded the sword portrayed the hand of Jehovah—his judgment—as expressed through Babylon's army. Second, Ezekiel acted out what the Jews would go through. Jehovah said to him: "Shave your head and your beard." The shaving of Ezekiel's head represented how the Jews would be attacked and wiped out. Furthermore, the command to "take scales to weigh and divide the hair into portions" implied that Jehovah's judgment against Jerusalem would be carried out, not haphazardly, but deliberately and thoroughly.

7 Why did Jehovah tell Ezekiel to divide his shaved-off hair into three portions and to treat each portion differently? **(Read Ezekiel 5:7-12.)** Ezekiel burned one portion of hair "inside the city" to demonstrate to onlookers that some inhabitants of Jerusalem would die in the city. Ezekiel struck a portion of hair with the sword "all around the city" to indicate that other inhabitants would be killed outside the city. He scattered the last portion of hair to the wind to illustrate that still other inhabitants would be scattered among the nations, but "a sword" would "chase after them." Thus, wherever those survivors might end up living, they would find no peace.

8 However, Ezekiel's prophetic enactment also contained a hint of hope. Regarding the hair that Ezekiel had shaved off, Jehovah told the prophet: "Take a few strands . . . and wrap them up in the folds of your garment." (Ezek. 5:3) That command indicated that a few of the Jews who would be scattered among the nations would be preserved. Some of those "few strands" would be among the exiles who were to return to Jerusalem after the 70-year-long captivity in Babylon. (Ezek. 6:8, 9; 11:17) Did that prophetic statement come true? Yes. A number of years after the end of the Babylonian captivity, the prophet Haggai reported that some of the scattered Jews had indeed returned to Jerusalem. They were the "old men who had seen the former house," that is, Solomon's temple. (Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:1-3) Jehovah saw to it that pure worship was preserved, just as he had promised. More details about that restoration will be considered in Chapter 9 of this publication.—Ezek. 11:17-20.

What Does This Prophecy Tell Us About Coming Events?

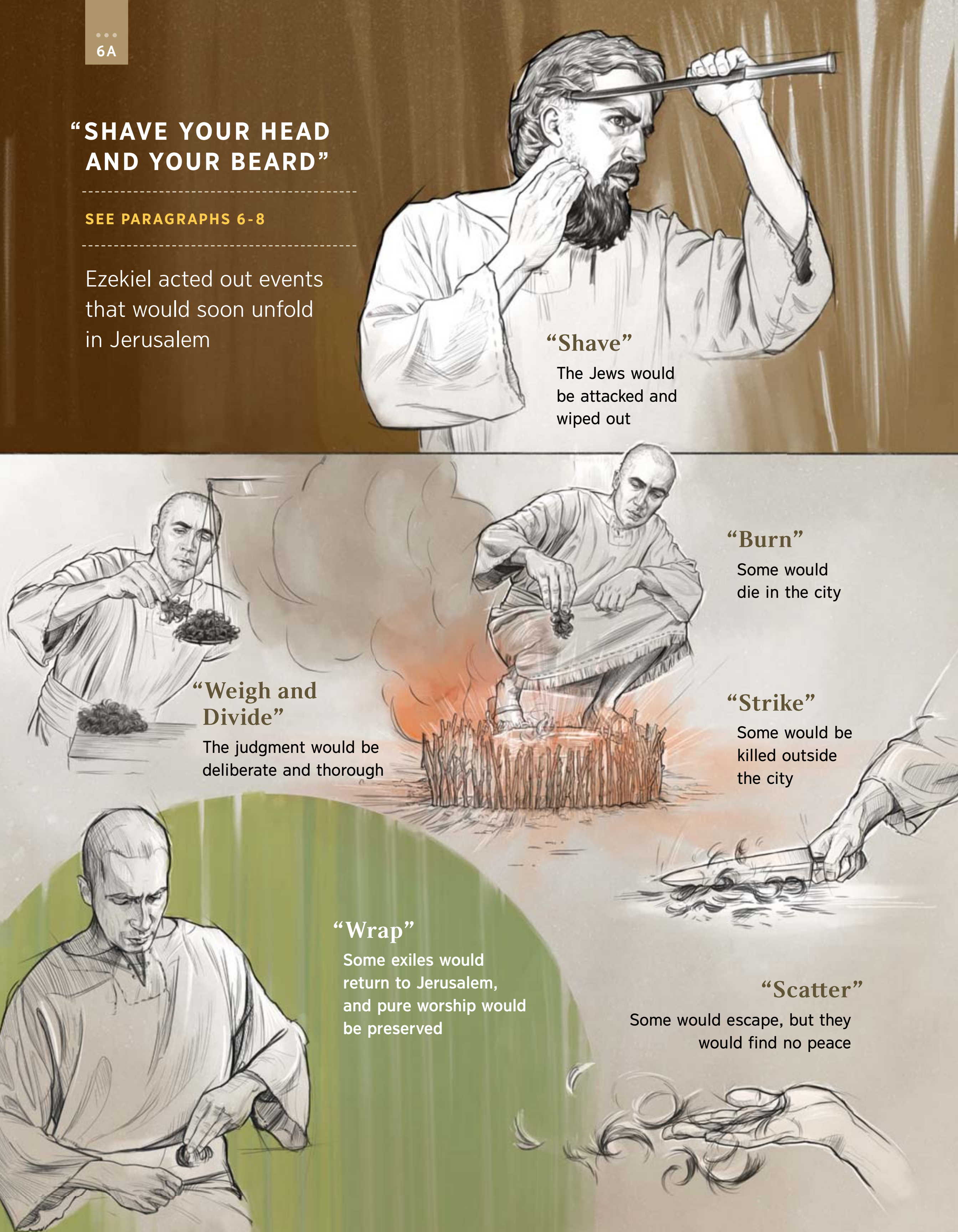
9 The events that Ezekiel acted out bring to mind the significant events that God's Word foretells for our future. What are some of them? As happened with the ancient city of Jerusalem, Jehovah will use secular forces to do the unthinkable

6A

“SHAVE YOUR HEAD AND YOUR BEARD”

SEE PARAGRAPHS 6-8

Ezekiel acted out events that would soon unfold in Jerusalem



“Shave”

The Jews would be attacked and wiped out

“Burn”

Some would die in the city

“Weigh and Divide”

The judgment would be deliberate and thorough

“Strike”

Some would be killed outside the city

“Wrap”

Some exiles would return to Jerusalem, and pure worship would be preserved

“Scatter”

Some would escape, but they would find no peace

11, 12. (a) How does our understanding of Ezekiel's prophecy about Jerusalem's siege affect our view of the ministry today? (b) Our preaching work and message may well undergo what change?

13. Why did Jehovah tell Ezekiel to lie on his left side and then on his right side?

—to attack all false religious organizations on earth. (Rev. 17:16-18) Just as Jerusalem's destruction was "a unique calamity," so the "great tribulation" with its war of Armageddon will be an event that "has not occurred" before.—Ezek. 5:9; 7:5; Matt. 24:21.

10 God's Word indicates that individual supporters of false religion will survive the coming destruction of religious institutions. Fearful, these survivors will join other individuals of all ranks who will be searching for a hiding place. (Zech. 13:4-6; Rev. 6:15-17) Their situation makes us think of what happened to the inhabitants of ancient Jerusalem who survived its destruction and were scattered "to the wind." As we considered in paragraph 7, although their lives were spared for a time, Jehovah drew "a sword to chase after them." (Ezek. 5:2) Similarly, any hiding places into which the survivors of the attack on religion may run will not shield them from Jehovah's sword. At Armageddon, they will be put to death, together with all other goatlike ones.— Ezek. 7:4; Matt. 25:33, 41, 46; Rev. 19:15, 18.

As far as sharing *good* news is concerned, we will become "mute"

11 How does our understanding of this prophecy affect our view of the ministry and its urgency? It impresses on us that we need to do our utmost today to help people to become servants of Jehovah. Why? The time left to "make disciples of people of all the nations" is limited. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Ezek. 33:14-16) When the attack of "the rod" (the secular forces) against religion begins, we will no longer preach a message of salvation. (Ezek. 7:10) As far as sharing *good* news is concerned, we will become "mute," just as Ezekiel became mute, or stopped proclaiming his messages, during part of his ministry. (Ezek. 3:26, 27; 33:21, 22) True, after the destruction of false religion, people will, in a sense, desperately "seek a vision from a prophet," but no lifesaving instructions will be given to them. (Ezek. 7:26) The time to receive such instruction and to become a disciple of Christ will have passed.

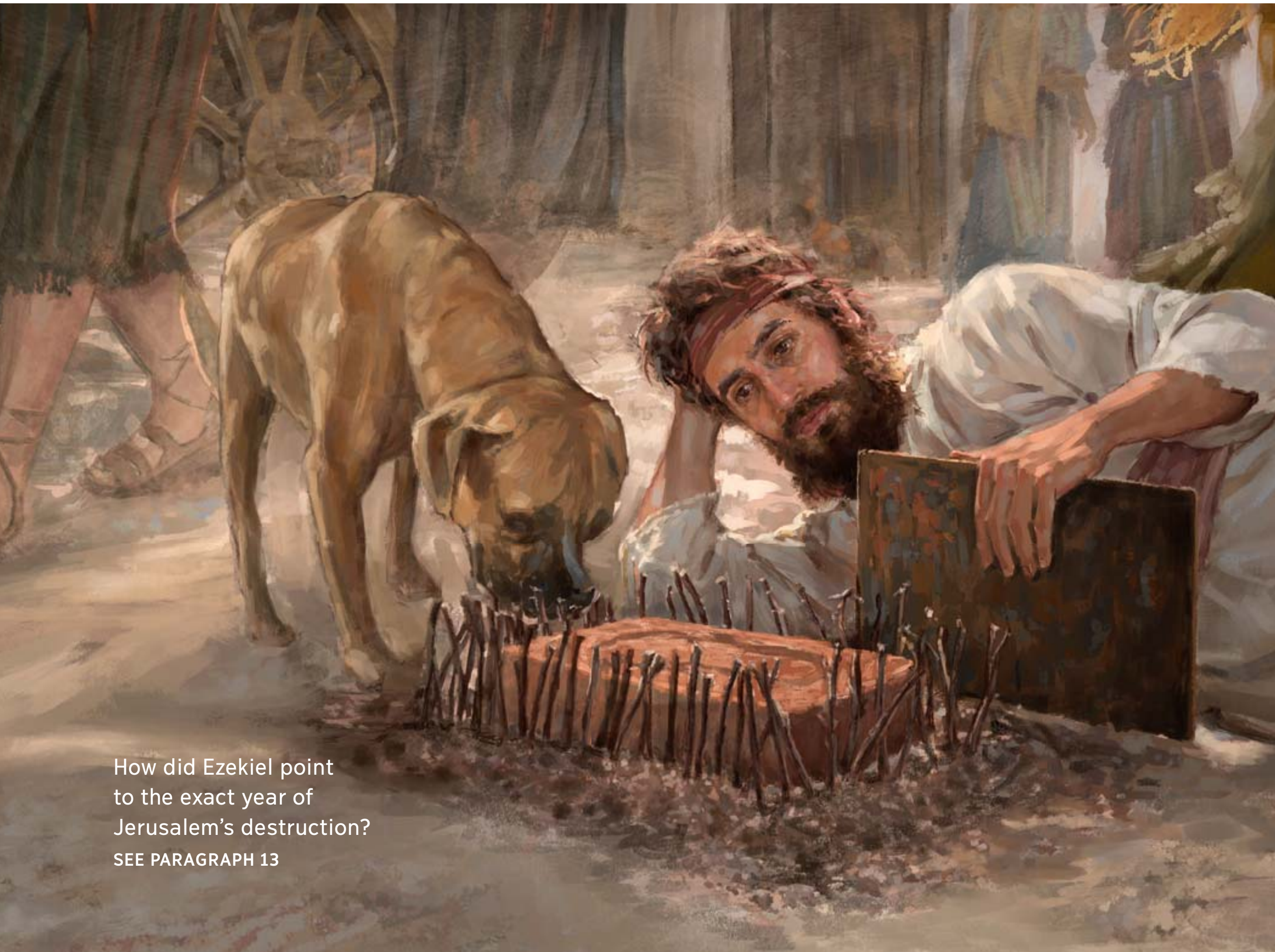
12 However, our work as preachers will not cease. Why not? During the great tribulation, we may well begin proclaiming a message of judgment that will be like a plague of hail. That message will clearly signal that the end of the wicked world is upon mankind.—Rev. 16:21.

"Look, It Is Coming!"

13 Besides foretelling *how* Jerusalem would be destroyed, Ezekiel also acted out *when* that would happen. Ezekiel was told by Jehovah to lie on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days. Each day represented a year. **(Read Ezekiel 4:4-6;** Num. 14:34) That enactment, which Ezekiel must have performed for only a part of each day, pointed to the exact year of Jerusalem's destruction. The 390 years of Israel's error evidently began in 997 B.C.E., the year that the 12-tribe kingdom was divided into two parts. (1 Ki. 12:12-20) The 40 years of Judah's sin likely began in 647 B.C.E., which was the year that Jeremiah was commissioned as a prophet to warn the kingdom of Judah, in clear-cut terms, about its coming destruction. (Jer. 1:1, 2, 17-19; 19:3, 4) Thus, both time periods would end in 607 B.C.E., the exact year in which Jerusalem fell and was destroyed, just as Jehovah had foretold.[2]

14. (a) How did Ezekiel show his confidence in Jehovah as an exact timekeeper? (b) What would precede Jerusalem's destruction?

14 At the time that Ezekiel received the prophecy of the 390 days and the 40 days, he may not have discerned the



How did Ezekiel point to the exact year of Jerusalem's destruction?

SEE PARAGRAPH 13

FOOTNOTE

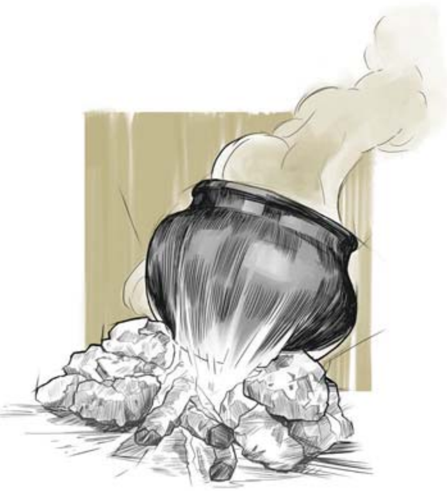
[2] By allowing the destruction of Jerusalem, Jehovah expressed his judgment against not only the two-tribe kingdom of Judah but also the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. (Jer. 11:17; Ezek. 9:9, 10) See *Insight on the Scriptures,* Vol. 1, p. 462, "Chronology—From 997 B.C.E. to Desolation of Jerusalem."

exact year of Jerusalem's end. Nevertheless, in the years leading up to its destruction, he repeatedly warned the Jews that Jehovah's judgment was coming. "The end is *now* upon you," he proclaimed. **(Read Ezekiel 7:3, 5-10.)** Ezekiel had no doubt that Jehovah would prove to be an exact timekeeper. (Isa. 46:10) The prophet also foretold what events would precede the destruction of Jerusalem: "There will come disaster upon disaster." Those events, in turn, would lead up to the breakdown of social, religious, and governmental structures.—Ezek. 7:11-13, 25-27.

15. What parts of Ezekiel's prophecy began to be fulfilled from 609 B.C.E. onward?

16. How may we today demonstrate our confidence in Jehovah as an exact timekeeper?

15 A few years after Ezekiel proclaimed Jerusalem's fall, the prophecy began to be fulfilled. In 609 B.C.E., Ezekiel learned that the attack against Jerusalem had begun. At that time, the sound of the trumpet summoned the inhabitants to defend their city, but as Ezekiel had foretold, "no one" was "going to the battle." (Ezek. 7:14) Jerusalem's inhabitants did not rally to the city's defense to fight the Babylonian invaders. Some Jews may have thought that Jehovah would come to their rescue. He had done so before when the Assyrians had threatened to take Jerusalem and an angel of Jehovah had destroyed most of their army. (2 Ki. 19:32) But no angelic help arrived this time. Before long, the besieged city resembled a "cooking pot" that was put "on the fire," and its inhabitants were caught like "pieces of meat" inside the pot. (Ezek. 24:1-10) After an agonizing siege that lasted 18 months, Jerusalem was destroyed.



Jerusalem under siege resembled a "cooking pot" put "on the fire"
SEE PARAGRAPH 15

"Store Up for Yourselves Treasures in Heaven"

16 What can we learn from this part of Ezekiel's prophecy? Does it relate to the message of our ministry and the reaction of those to whom we preach? Jehovah has determined when the approaching destruction of false religion will come about—and again he will prove to be an exact timekeeper. (2 Pet. 3:9, 10; Rev. 7:1-3) We do not know the precise date of that event. Like Ezekiel, though, we continue to carry out Jehovah's instruction to warn people repeatedly, saying: "The end is now upon you." Why do we need to repeat that message? For the same reason that Ezekiel needed to do so.[3] Most people to whom he proclaimed God's prophecy about Jerusalem's fall did not believe it. (Ezek. 12:27, 28) But later, some Jewish exiles in Babylon showed a righteous heart condition, and they returned to their homeland. (Isa. 49:8)

FOOTNOTE

[3] Note that in the brief passage found at Ezekiel 7:5-7, Jehovah mentions the words "come" and "coming" six times.

Similarly, many people today dismiss the idea that this world will come to an end. (2 Pet. 3:3, 4) Even so, until the time for mankind to accept God's message runs out, we want to help honesthearted individuals to find the road that leads to life.—Matt. 7:13, 14; 2 Cor. 6:2.

[17] Ezekiel's prophecy also reminds us that when the coming attack against religious organizations occurs, members of the churches will not be "going to the battle" to defend religion. Instead, as they begin to realize that their cry for help, "Lord, Lord," is going unanswered, "their hands will hang limp" and they will be "shuddering." (Ezek. 7:3, 14, 17, 18; Matt. 7:21-23) What else will they do? **(Read Ezekiel 7:19-21.)** Jehovah says: "They will throw their silver into the streets." That statement regarding the inhabitants of ancient Jerusalem also vividly illustrates what will take place during the

17. What conditions and events will we witness during the coming great tribulation?

Though many do not listen, we keep searching for honesthearted people
SEE PARAGRAPH 16

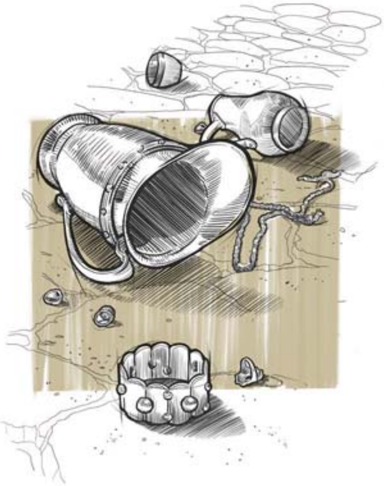
great tribulation. At that time, people will realize that money cannot save them from the coming calamity.

18. What lesson about setting priorities can we draw from Ezekiel's prophecy?

19. How do Ezekiel's prophetic proclamations affect us today?

[18] Do you discern a lesson for us in this part of Ezekiel's prophecy? It is about the need to set the right priorities. Consider this: Only *after* the inhabitants of Jerusalem understood that the end of their city and their life was upon them and that material goods could not save them, only *after* that did they drastically change their priorities. They threw their possessions away and began to "seek a vision from a prophet"—but their change came too late. (Ezek. 7:26) In contrast, we are already fully aware that the end of this wicked world is upon us. Therefore, our faith in God's promises has moved us to set the right priorities in life. As a result, we are busy pursuing spiritual riches, which have lasting value and will never be thrown "into the streets."—**Read Matthew 6: 19-21, 24.**

[19] In summary, what are some of the ways that Ezekiel's prophetic statements about the fall of Jerusalem affect us today? They remind us that the time still available for helping others to become God's servants is limited. Hence, we carry out the disciple-making work with urgency. We rejoice greatly when honesthearted individuals begin to worship our Father, Jehovah. However, even to those who do not take that step, we continue to give the warning that Ezekiel gave to the people in his day: "The end is now upon you." (Ezek. 3: 19, 21; 7:3) At the same time, we are determined to maintain our trust in Jehovah and to keep his pure worship first and foremost in our life.—Ps. 52:7, 8; Prov. 11:28; Matt. 6:33.



Why did the inhabitants of ancient Jerusalem "throw their silver into the streets"?

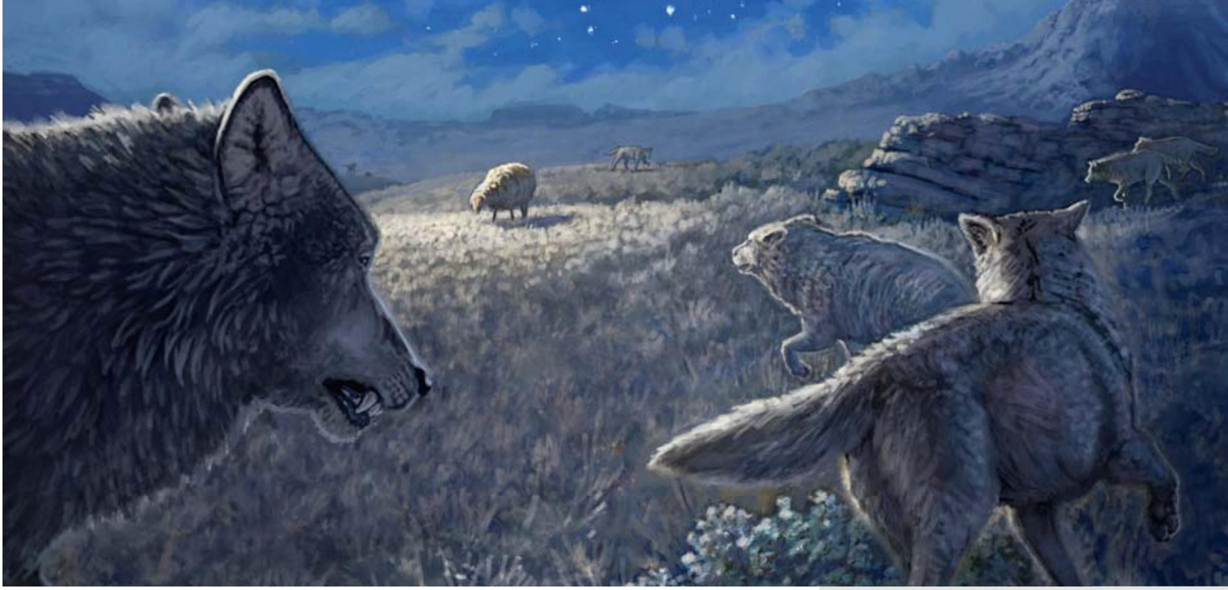
SEE PARAGRAPH 17

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 The events that Ezekiel acted out remind us of what momentous events that God's Word foretold for our future?

2 How does the way Ezekiel carried out his commission to preach Jehovah's warnings affect your view of the ministry?

3 Why might the prophecies that we considered in this chapter move you to reexamine your priorities, and what changes have you already made?



7

THE NATIONS “WILL HAVE TO KNOW THAT I AM JEHOVAH”

EZEKIEL 25:17

FOCUS: *What we learn from Israel’s interaction with the nations that defamed Jehovah’s name*

1, 2. (a) How had Israel been like a lone sheep amid wolves? (See opening picture.) (b) What did the Israelites and their kings allow to happen?

FOR hundreds of years, Israel had been like a lone sheep amid a pack of wolves. The Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites menaced Israel on its eastern border. The Philistines, constant enemies of Israel, maintained a foothold to the west. To the north lay the city of Tyre, the rich and powerful hub of a vast trading empire. To the south sprawled the ancient nation of Egypt, ruled by its god-king, Pharaoh.

2 When the Israelites relied on Jehovah, he protected them from their enemies. Time and again, though, his people and their kings allowed themselves to be corrupted by the nations that surrounded them. King Ahab is just one example of such a weak-willed ruler. A contemporary of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, he ruled the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. He married a daughter of the Sidonian king who controlled the prosperous city of Tyre. That woman, named Jezebel, fanatically promoted Baal worship in Israel and influenced her husband to

3, 4. (a) To whom did Ezekiel now turn his attention? (b) What questions will we consider?

5, 6. What was the relationship between the Ammonites and the Israelites?

7. How did the Moabites treat their cousins, the descendants of Israel?

contaminate pure worship on an unprecedented scale.—1 Ki. 16:30-33; 18:4, 19.

3 Jehovah had warned his people about the consequences of disloyalty to him. Now his patience had finally run out. (Jer. 21:7, 10; Ezek. 5:7-9) In 609 B.C.E., the Babylonian army returned to the Promised Land for the third time. It had been almost ten years since their last invasion. This time, they would tear down the walls of Jerusalem and crush those who rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. As the siege began and Ezekiel's inspired prophecies were fulfilled in grim detail, the prophet turned his attention to the nations surrounding the Promised Land.

4 Jehovah revealed to Ezekiel that Judah's enemies would rejoice over the destruction of Jerusalem and harass the survivors. But the nations that slandered Jehovah's name and persecuted or corrupted his people would not escape the consequences of their actions. What practical lessons can we learn from Israel's interaction with those nations? And how do Ezekiel's prophecies regarding the nations give us hope today?

The nations that slandered Jehovah's name would not escape the consequences of their actions

Relatives Who Treated Israel With "Utter Scorn"

5 Ammon, Moab, and Edom were, in a sense, blood relatives of Israel. Despite their family ties and shared history, those nations built up a long record of hostility toward God's people and treated them with "utter scorn."—Ezek. 25:6.

6 Consider the ***Ammonites.*** They descended from Abraham's nephew Lot through his younger daughter. (Gen. 19:38) Their language was so closely related to Hebrew that God's people could likely understand it. Because of this family bond, Jehovah told the Israelites not to initiate war against Ammon. (Deut. 2:19) Yet, in the days of the Judges, the Ammonites joined Moabite King Eglon in oppressing Israel. (Judg. 3:12-15, 27-30) Later, when Saul was made king, the Ammonites attacked Israel. (1 Sam. 11:1-4) And in the days of King Jehoshaphat, they again joined forces with Moab to invade the Promised Land.—2 Chron. 20:1, 2.

7 The ***Moabites*** too were descendants of Lot but through his older daughter. (Gen. 19:36, 37) Jehovah told the Israelites not to engage in war with Moab. (Deut. 2:9) But the Moabites did not return the kindness. Instead of helping their cousins, who were escaping slavery in Egypt, they tried to prevent

7A

THE NATIONS SURROUNDING JERUSALEM

c. 650-300 B.C.E.

TIME LINE (ALL YEARS B.C.E.)

620: Babylon begins to dominate Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar makes Jerusalem’s king a vassal

617: Babylon takes first captives from Jerusalem Rulers, mighty warriors, and craftsmen are taken to Babylon

607: Babylon destroys Jerusalem The city and her temple are burned

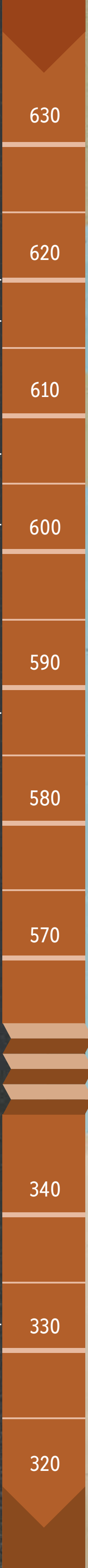
After 607: Tyre, mainland Nebuchadnezzar attacks Tyre for 13 years. He conquers mainland Tyre, but the island-city remains

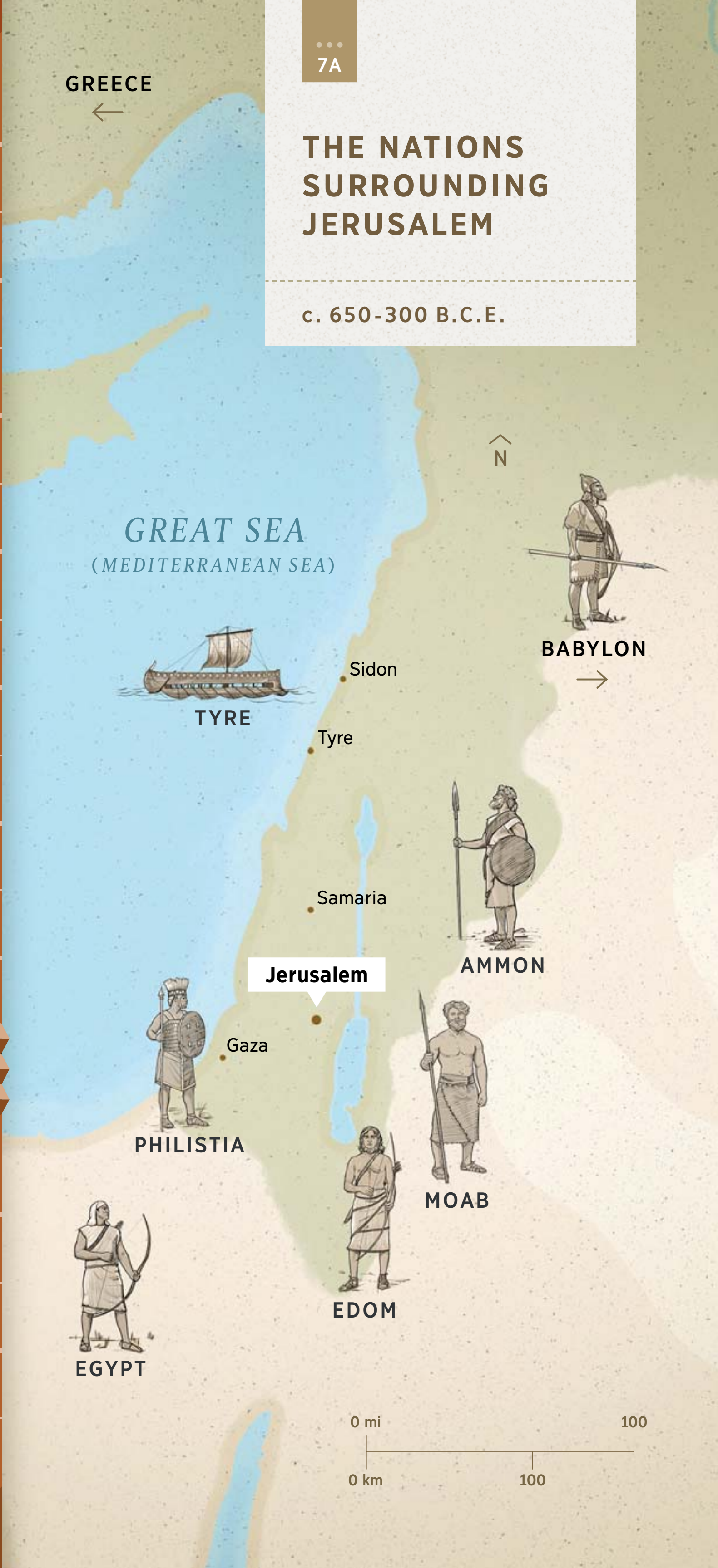
602: Ammon and Moab Nebuchadnezzar invades Ammon and Moab

588: Babylon defeats Egypt In the 37th year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar invades Egypt

332: Tyre, island-city The Greek army, commanded by Alexander the Great, destroys the island-city of Tyre

332 or earlier: Philistia Alexander conquers Gaza, a Philistine capital city


630
620
610
600
590
580
570
340
330
320


GREECE
GREAT SEA
(MEDITERRANEAN SEA)
N
BABYLON
TYRE
Sidon
Tyre
Samaria
Jerusalem
AMMON
Gaza
PHILISTIA
MOAB
EDOM
EGYPT
0 mi
100
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100

8. Why did Jehovah say that Edom was Israel's brother, but how did the Edomites act?

9, 10. (a) What happened to Ammon, Moab, and Edom? (b) What examples show that not all members of those nations were hostile to Israel?

11. What can we learn from Israel's dealings with the nations of Ammon, Moab, and Edom?

them from entering the Promised Land. Moabite King Balak hired Balaam to curse the Israelites, and Balaam taught Balak how to lure the Israelite men into committing immorality and idolatry. (Num. 22:1-8; 25:1-9; Rev. 2:14) For centuries the Moabites continued to oppress their relatives, right down to Ezekiel's day.—2 Ki. 24:1, 2.

8 The ***Edomites*** were descendants of Jacob's twin brother, Esau. The bond with Israel was so close that Jehovah referred to the Edomites and the Israelites as brothers. (Deut. 2:1-5; 23:7, 8) Even so, the Edomites opposed Israel from the time of the Exodus to the destruction of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. (Num. 20:14, 18; Ezek. 25:12) At that time, the Edomites not only rejoiced at Israel's suffering, urging the Babylonians to desolate Jerusalem, but also blocked the escape of any fleeing Israelites and handed them over to the enemy.—Ps. 137:7; Obad. 11, 14.

9 Jehovah called Israel's extended family to account for the way they treated His people. He said: "I will give . . . the Ammonites as a possession to the people of the East, so that the Ammonites will not be remembered among the nations." He also said: "I will execute judgment in Moab, and they will have to know that I am Jehovah." (Ezek. 25:10, 11) Some five years after Jerusalem fell, those prophecies began to be fulfilled when the Babylonians conquered Ammon and Moab. Regarding Edom, Jehovah said that he would "cut off from it both man and livestock" and that he would "make it desolate." (Ezek. 25:13) As foretold, Ammon, Moab, and Edom eventually ceased to exist.—Jer. 9:25, 26; 48:42; 49:17, 18.

10 However, not all members of those nations were hostile to God's people. Zelek the Ammonite and Ithmah the Moabite, for example, are named among King David's mighty warriors. (1 Chron. 11:26, 39, 46; 12:1) And Ruth the Moabitess became a loyal worshipper of Jehovah.—Ruth 1:4, 16, 17.

11 What ***lessons*** can we learn from Israel's dealings with those nations? First, when Israel let down her guard, the corrupting false religious practices of her relatives crept in, such as worship of the Moabite Baal of Peor and the Ammonite god Molech. (Num. 25:1-3; 1 Ki. 11:7) Something similar could happen to us. We may face pressure from unbelieving relatives who encourage us to drop our guard. For example, they may not understand why we do not celebrate Easter, exchange gifts at Christmas, or share in other popular customs that are associated with false religious beliefs. With the best of inten-

tions, they may try to get us—even briefly—to compromise our standards. How vital it is, though, that we never succumb to such pressure! As the history of Israel shows, even one step off the "cliff" of compromise can lead to disaster.

12 We can learn another lesson from Israel's experiences with Ammon, Moab, and Edom. We may face severe opposition from unbelieving family members. Jesus warned that at times the message we preach would "cause division, with a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother." (Matt. 10:35, 36) Jehovah instructed the Israelites not to start a quarrel with their relatives, and we do not seek confrontation with our nonbelieving family members. But we should not be surprised when opposition comes.—2 Tim. 3:12.

13 Even if our relatives do not directly oppose our worship of Jehovah, we must not let them have more influence over us than Jehovah does. Why not? Because Jehovah deserves first place in our heart. **(Read Matthew 10:37.)** In addition, if we remain loyal to Jehovah, some of our relatives might prove to be like Zelek, Ithmah, and Ruth and join us in pure worship. (1 Tim. 4:16) Then they too will have the pleasure of serving the only true God and enjoying his love and protection.

Jehovah's Enemies Received "Furious Punishments"

14 The ***Philistines*** had migrated from the island of Crete to the land that Jehovah later promised to Abraham and his descendants. Both Abraham and Isaac had dealings with these people. (Gen. 21:29-32; 26:1) By the time the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the Philistines had grown into a powerful nation with a formidable military force. They worshipped false gods, such as Baal-zebub and Dagon. (1 Sam. 5:1-4; 2 Ki. 1:2, 3) At times Israel joined in worshipping those gods.—Judg. 10:6.

15 Because of Israel's unfaithfulness, Jehovah allowed the Philistines to dominate his people for many years. (Judg. 10:7, 8; Ezek. 25:15) They imposed oppressive restrictions on the Israelites[1] and slaughtered many of them. (1 Sam. 4:10) When Israel repented and returned to Jehovah, however, he rescued them. He raised up such men as Samson, Saul, and David to deliver His people. (Judg. 13:5, 24; 1 Sam. 9:15-17; 18:6, 7) And as foretold by Ezekiel, the Philistines experienced "furious punishments" when the Babylonians and later the Greeks invaded their land.—Ezek. 25:15-17.

12, 13. What opposition might we face, but what might happen if we remain loyal?

14, 15. How did the Philistines treat the Israelites?

Never step off the "cliff" of compromise

FOOTNOTE

[1] For example, the Philistines banned any metalworkers from operating in Israel. The Israelites had to go to the Philistines to have farming implements sharpened and were charged the equivalent of several days' wages for the work.—1 Sam. 13:19-22.

7B

KEY STATEMENTS IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

“Son of Man”

MORE THAN 90 OCCURRENCES

More than 90 times, Ezekiel is referred to as “son of man.” (Ezek. 2:1) Jehovah thus reminds him that even though he has received great privileges, he is only an earthling man. Significantly, in the Gospel accounts, Jesus is referred to as “Son of man” some 80 times, showing that he became completely human and was not an angel merely materializing in human form.—Matt. 8:20.

16, 17. What lessons can we learn from Israel’s dealings with the Philistines?

18. What kind of empire did Tyre control?

16 What *lessons* can we learn from Israel’s dealings with the Philistines? Jehovah’s modern-day people have faced opposition from some of the most powerful nations ever to dominate mankind. Unlike Israel, we have maintained a record of steadfast loyalty to Jehovah. Even so, the enemies of pure worship may at times seem to prevail. For instance, at the beginning of the 20th century, the government of the United States attempted to stop the work of Jehovah’s people by sentencing those who took the lead in the organization to decades in prison. During the second world war, the Nazi party in Germany tried to wipe out God’s people, imprisoning thousands and killing hundreds. After that war, the Soviet Union waged a sustained campaign against Jehovah’s Witnesses, sending our brothers to labor camps or exiling them to remote regions of the land.

17 Governments may continue to ban the preaching work, imprison God’s people, and even execute some of us. Should these events cause us to give in to fear or to lose faith? No! Jehovah will preserve his loyal people. **(Read Matthew 10:28-31.)** We have already seen powerful, repressive governments disappear, while Jehovah’s people have continued to flourish. Soon, all human governments will share an outcome similar to that of the Philistines—they will be forced to know Jehovah. And like the Philistines, they will cease to exist!

“Abundant Wealth” Gave No Lasting Protection

18 The ancient city of *Tyre*[2] sat at the center of one of the great commercial empires in the ancient world. To the west, her ships spun a web of trade routes that stretched across the

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FOOTNOTE

[2] The original city of Tyre seems to have been built on a rocky outcrop located just off the coast, about 30 miles north of Mount Carmel. Later, an extension of the city was constructed on the mainland. The Semitic name for the city, Sur, means “Rock.”

“. . . Will Have to Know That I Am Jehovah”

MORE THAN 50 OCCURRENCES

More than 50 times, Ezekiel records God’s statement that people “will have to know that I am Jehovah,” emphasizing that Jehovah is the only one worthy of receiving pure worship.—Ezek. 6:7.

“Sovereign Lord Jehovah”

217 OCCURRENCES

The expression “Sovereign Lord Jehovah” appears 217 times, giving the divine name the prominence it deserves and stressing that all creation is subordinate to Jehovah.—Ezek. 2:4.

Mediterranean Sea. To the east, Tyre’s web extended along the overland routes that linked her to distant empires. For centuries, she added to her vast stockpile of wealth from these far-flung locations. Her merchants and tradesmen became so rich that they viewed themselves as princes.—Isa. 23:8.

19 Under Kings David and Solomon, Israel had close ties with the inhabitants of Tyre, who supplied material and craftsmen to help build David’s palace and later Solomon’s temple. (2 Chron. 2:1, 3, 7-16) Tyre saw the nation of Israel at its best. (1 Ki. 3:10-12; 10:4-9) Just think of the opportunity that thousands of Tyrians had to learn about pure worship, to get to know Jehovah, and to observe firsthand the benefits that come from serving the true God!

20 Despite that opportunity, however, the inhabitants of Tyre remained steadfastly materialistic in their outlook. They did not follow the example of the powerful Canaanite city of Gibeon, whose inhabitants merely heard about Jehovah’s great works and were moved to become his servants. (Josh. 9:2, 3, 22–10:2) In fact, the inhabitants of Tyre ended up opposing God’s people and even sold some of them into slavery.—Ps. 83:2, 7; Joel 3:4, 6; Amos 1:9.

21 Through Ezekiel, Jehovah said to those opposers: “Here I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, just as the sea brings up its waves. They will destroy the walls of Tyre and tear down her towers, and I will scrape away soil and make her a shining, bare rock.” (Ezek. 26:1-5) For protection, the inhabitants of Tyre trusted in their riches, which they felt provided them with the same

19, 20. What contrast is there between the inhabitants of Tyre and those of Gibeon?

21, 22. What happened to Tyre, and why?

23. What lesson can we learn from the inhabitants of Tyre?

24-26. (a) Why did Jehovah call Egypt "a piece of straw"? (b) How did King Zedekiah ignore Jehovah's direction, and with what result?

security as the island-city's 150-foot-high walls. They would have done well to pay attention to Solomon's warning: "The wealth of the rich is his fortified city; it is like a protective wall in his imagination."—Prov. 18:11.

22 When the Babylonians and then the Greeks fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy, the inhabitants of Tyre discovered that the security offered both by the city's wealth and by her literal walls was imaginary. After destroying Jerusalem, the Babylonians waged a campaign against Tyre for 13 years. (Ezek. 29:17, 18) Then, in 332 B.C.E., Alexander the Great fulfilled a remarkable aspect of prophecies conveyed by Ezekiel.[3] His army scraped together the ruins of the mainland city of Tyre and threw the stones, woodwork, and soil into the water, building a path to reach the island-city. (Ezek. 26:4, 12) Alexander breached the walls, plundered the city, killed thousands of soldiers and citizens, and sold tens of thousands more into slavery. The inhabitants of Tyre were forced to know Jehovah when they learned the hard way that "abundant wealth" gives no lasting protection.—Ezek. 27:33, 34.

Never would we want to view material things as a protective wall

23 What ***lesson*** can we learn from the inhabitants of Tyre? Never would we want to allow "the deceptive power of riches" to cause us to trust in material things, viewing them as a protective wall. (Matt. 13:22) We cannot "slave for God and for Riches." **(Read Matthew 6:24.)** Only those who serve Jehovah whole-souled are truly secure. (Matt. 6:31-33; John 10:27-29) Prophecies about the end of this present system will be fulfilled in every detail just as surely as the prophecies against Tyre came true. At that time, those who trust in wealth will be forced to know Jehovah when he destroys this world's greedy, self-centered commercial system.

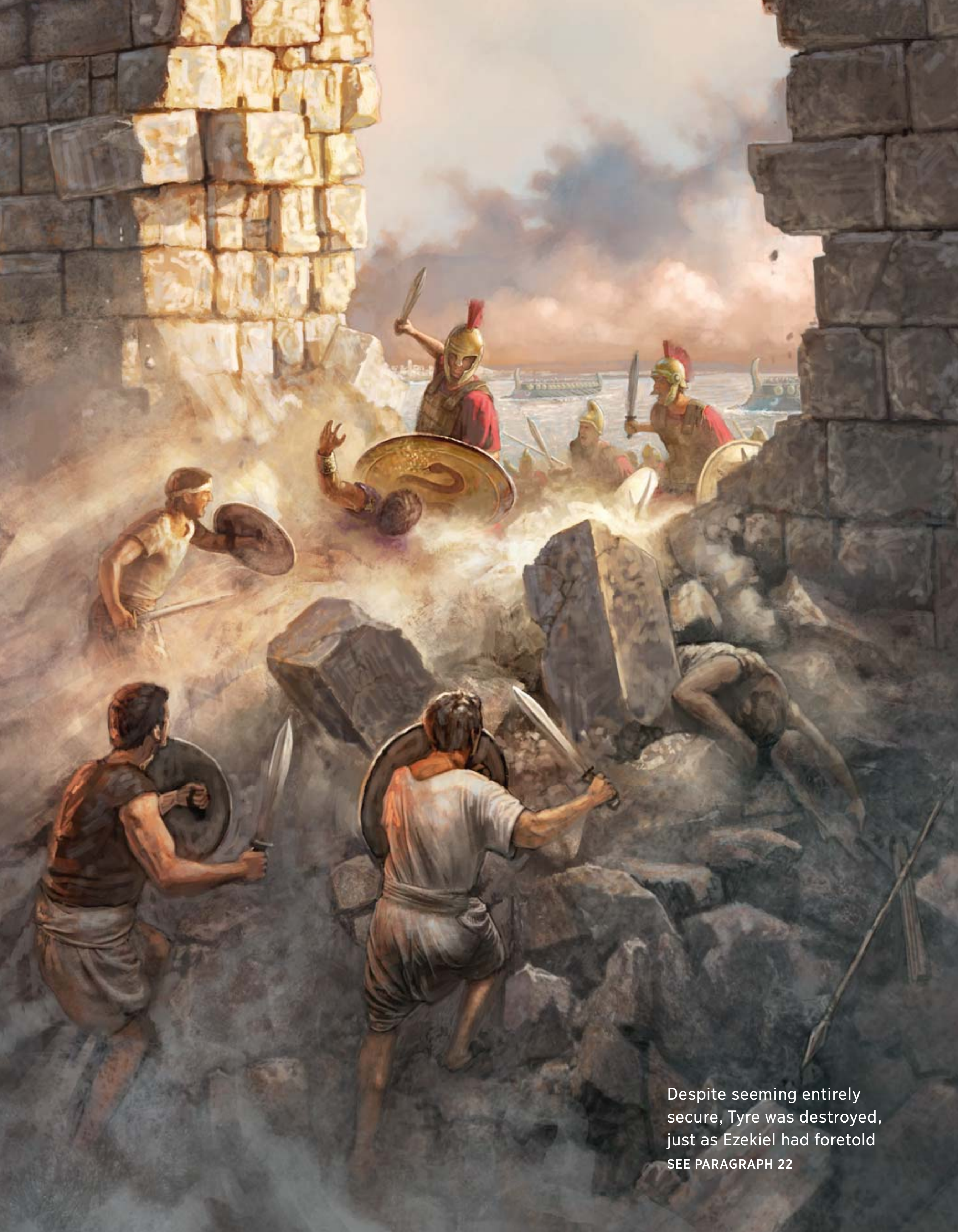
Political Power Was "a Piece of Straw"

24 From before the days of Joseph to the time when the Babylonians marched on Jerusalem, ***Egypt*** wielded considerable political influence in the region of the Promised Land. Her ancient roots may have made her appear to be stable, like an old-growth tree. But when compared with Jehovah, she was feeble—no stronger than "a piece of straw."—Ezek. 29:6.

25 Apostate King Zedekiah did not recognize that about Egypt. Through the prophet Jeremiah, Jehovah had urged Zedekiah to submit to the king of Babylon. (Jer. 27:12)

FOOTNOTE

[3] Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Amos, and Zechariah also uttered prophecies against Tyre that were fulfilled in every detail.—Isa. 23:1-8; Jer. 25:15, 22, 27; Joel 3:4; Amos 1:10; Zech. 9:3, 4.



Despite seeming entirely secure, Tyre was destroyed, just as Ezekiel had foretold

SEE PARAGRAPH 22

ELECTION UPDATE
54%
40%
CARLSON
BREAKING NEWS

Even in private, we must avoid taking sides in this world's politics
SEE PARAGRAPH 27

27. What can we learn from Israel's interaction with Egypt?

Zedekiah even took an oath in Jehovah's name not to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. But then he ignored Jehovah's direction, broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, and appealed to Egypt for help in his fight against the Babylonians. (2 Chron. 36:13; Ezek. 17:12-20) However, the Israelites who relied on the political might of Egypt brought great harm to themselves. (Ezek. 29:7) As for Egypt, she may have appeared to be as formidable as a "great sea monster." (Ezek. 29:3, 4) But Jehovah said he would deal with her in the same way that hunters capture Nile crocodiles—he would put hooks in her jaws and draw her toward destruction. He did so when he sent the Babylonians to conquer that ancient land.—Ezek. 29:9-12, 19.

26 What became of unfaithful Zedekiah? Because he rebelled against Jehovah, Ezekiel foretold that this "wicked chieftain" would lose his crown and that his rulership would end in ruin. But Ezekiel also gave hope. (Ezek. 21:25-27) Jehovah had him foretell that a king in the royal line, one who had "the legal right," would claim the throne. In the next chapter of this publication, we will see who this proved to be.

27 What ***lesson*** can we learn from Israel's interaction with Egypt? Jehovah's people today need to avoid putting their trust in political powers, thinking that such powers will provide lasting security. Even in our thoughts, we need to remain "no part of the world." (John 15:19; Jas. 4:4) The political system may seem strong, but like ancient Egypt, it is as fragile as a piece of straw. How shortsighted it would be to invest our hope in mortal humans rather than in the almighty Sovereign of the universe!—**Read Psalm 146:3-6.**

28-30. What is the difference between the way that the nations "will *have* to know" Jehovah and the way that we know Jehovah?

The Nations "Will *Have* to Know"

28 Several times in the book of Ezekiel, Jehovah states that the nations "will *have* to know that I am Jehovah." (Ezek. 25:17) Those words certainly came true in ancient times when Jehovah executed judgment on the enemies of his people. But they will have a greater fulfillment in our day. In what way?

29 Like God's people in ancient times, we are surrounded by nations that consider us to be as defenseless as a lone sheep. (Ezek. 38:10-13) As will be discussed in Chapters 17 and 18 of this publication, the nations will soon launch a vicious, all-out attack on God's people. But when they do, they will be taught the meaning of real power. They will be forced to know Jehovah—to recognize his sovereignty—when he destroys them at the battle of Armageddon.—Rev. 16:16; 19:17-21.

30 By contrast, Jehovah will keep us safe, and he will bless us. Why? Because we have taken the opportunity now to prove that we know Jehovah by trusting in him, by obeying him, and by giving him the pure worship he deserves.—**Read Ezekiel 28:26.**

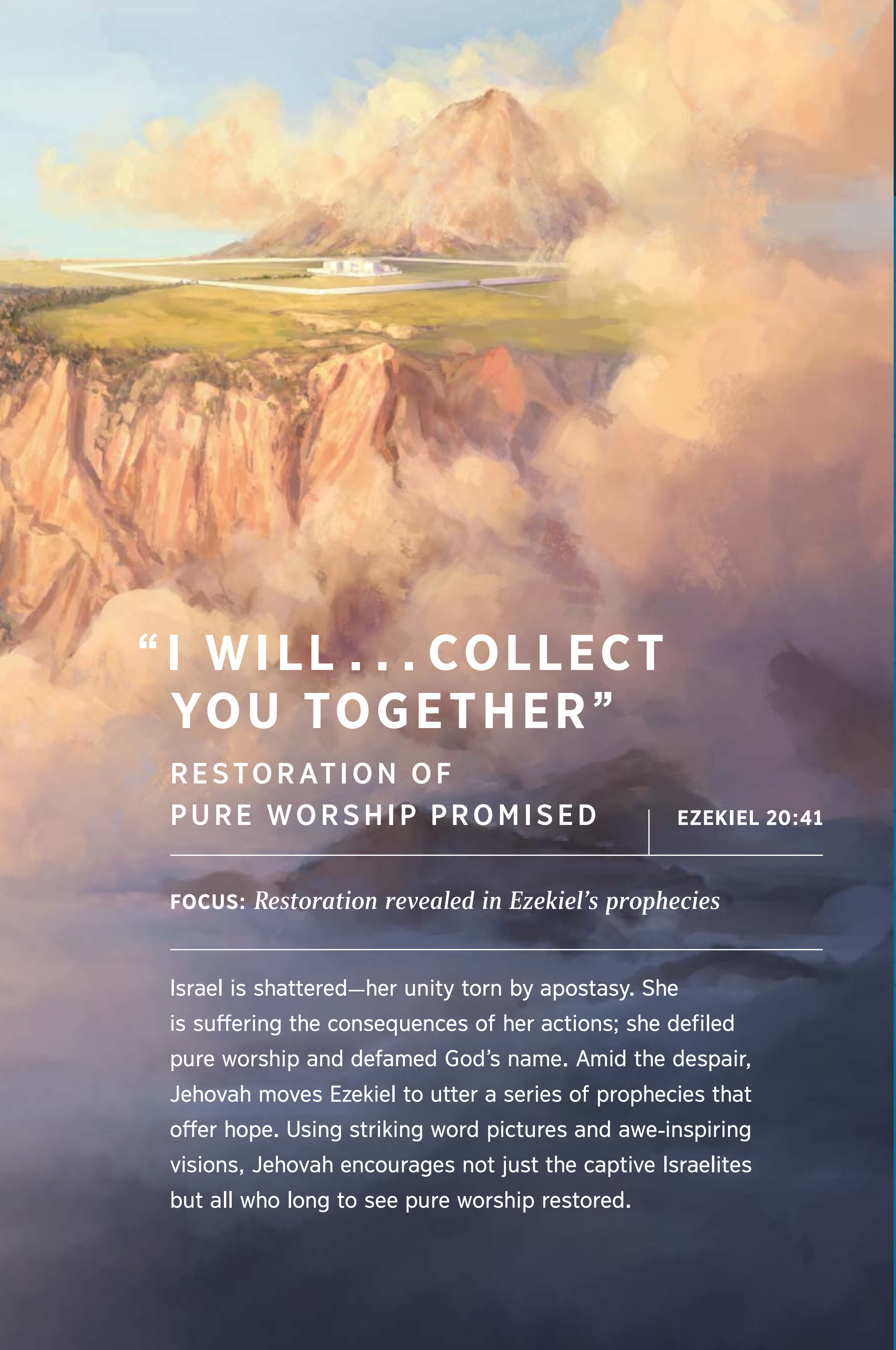
YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 Why should it not surprise us if family members oppose our worship of Jehovah?

2 About what should we remain confident even if powerful governments persecute us?

3 What lesson did you learn from the inhabitants of Tyre?

4 How can you show that you know Jehovah?



3

SECTION THREE

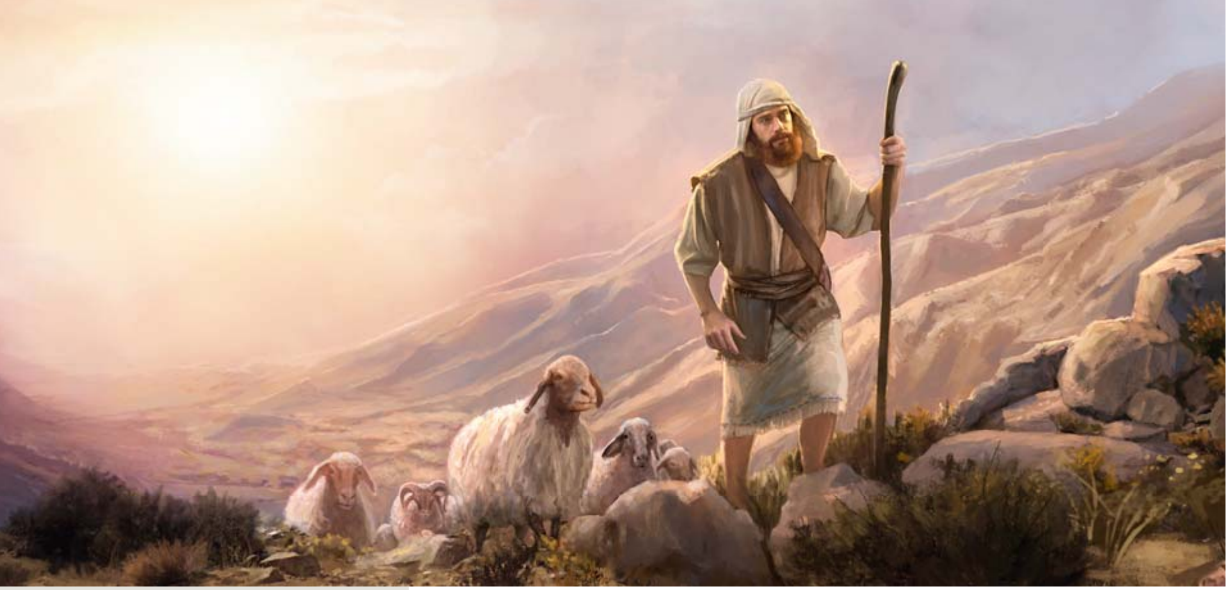
“I WILL . . . COLLECT YOU TOGETHER”

RESTORATION OF PURE WORSHIP PROMISED

EZEKIEL 20:41

FOCUS: *Restoration revealed in Ezekiel’s prophecies*

Israel is shattered—her unity torn by apostasy. She is suffering the consequences of her actions; she defiled pure worship and defamed God’s name. Amid the despair, Jehovah moves Ezekiel to utter a series of prophecies that offer hope. Using striking word pictures and awe-inspiring visions, Jehovah encourages not just the captive Israelites but all who long to see pure worship restored.



8

“I WILL RAISE UP ONE SHEPHERD”

EZEKIEL 34:23

FOCUS: *Four Messianic prophecies and their fulfillment in Christ*

1-3. Why is Ezekiel’s heart heavy, and what is he now inspired to record?

IT IS the sixth year of Ezekiel’s exile.[1] The prophet’s heart is heavy as he reflects on the sad state of rulership in Judah, his beloved homeland hundreds of miles away. He has seen rulers come and go.

2 Ezekiel was born in the middle of the reign of faithful King Josiah. Ezekiel must have been thrilled when he learned about the campaign Josiah had conducted to destroy graven images and to restore pure worship in Judah. (2 Chron. 34:1-8) But Josiah’s efforts did not lead to permanent reform, for he was followed by kings who for the most part continued to practice idolatry. Not surprisingly, under such bad rulers the nation has sunk ever deeper into the mire of spiritual and moral decay. Is all hope lost? By no means!

3 Jehovah inspires his faithful prophet to record a prophecy—the first of several—about the Messiah, the future Ruler and Shepherd who will permanently restore pure worship and tenderly care for Jehovah’s sheep. We do well to con-

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FOOTNOTE

[1] The first year of the exile began in 617 B.C.E. when the initial Jewish captives were taken to Babylon. Hence, the sixth year began in 612 B.C.E.

sider those prophecies carefully, for their fulfillment affects our everlasting future. Let us, then, examine four Messianic prophecies found in the book of Ezekiel.

"A Tender Shoot" Becomes "a Majestic Cedar"

4 About 612 B.C.E., "the word of Jehovah" came to Ezekiel, and he related a prophecy that shows *the scope of Messiah's rule and the need to trust in his Kingdom.* Jehovah introduced the prophecy by directing Ezekiel to tell his fellow exiles a prophetic riddle that illustrated the faithlessness of Judah's rulers and underscored the need for the righteous Messianic Ruler.—Ezek. 17:1, 2.

5 **Read Ezekiel 17:3-10.** Here is the gist of the riddle: A "great eagle" plucks off the topmost shoot of a cedar tree and sets it down "in a city of traders." The eagle then takes "some of the seed of the land" and plants it in a fertile field "by abundant waters." The seed flourishes, growing into a "sprawling vine." Next, a second "great eagle" appears. The roots of the vine reach "eagerly toward" the second eagle, seeking to be transplanted by it to another well-watered spot. Jehovah condemns the vine's actions, indicating that its roots would be torn out and that it would "dry up completely."

6 What did the riddle mean? **(Read Ezekiel 17:11-15.)** In 617 B.C.E., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (the first "great eagle") besieged Jerusalem. He plucked Judean King Jehoiachin (the "topmost shoot") from his throne and brought him to Babylon ("a city of traders"). Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah (one of the royal "seed of the land") on the throne in Jerusalem. The new Judean king was made to take an oath in God's name, obligating him to be a loyal vassal king. (2 Chron. 36:13) But Zedekiah despised his oath; he rebelled against Babylon and turned to the Egyptian Pharaoh (the second "great eagle") for military help, but to no avail. Jehovah condemned the disloyal actions of that oath-breaker, Zedekiah. (Ezek. 17:16-21) In the end, Zedekiah was dethroned, and he died in prison in Babylon.—Jer. 52:6-11.

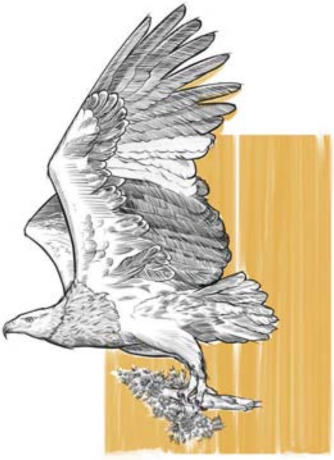
7 What lessons can we learn from the prophetic riddle? First, as pure worshippers we need to be true to our word. "Let your word 'Yes' mean yes, your 'No,' no," said Jesus. (Matt. 5:37) If we find it necessary to swear before God to tell the truth—such as when testifying in a court of law—we view such an oath as a serious matter. Second, we must guard against misplaced confidence. The Bible warns us: "Do not

4. What prophecy did Ezekiel relate, and how did Jehovah introduce that prophecy?

5. What is the gist of the riddle?

6. Explain the meaning of the riddle.

7. What lessons can we learn from the prophetic riddle?



The first great eagle represented King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon
SEE PARAGRAPH 6

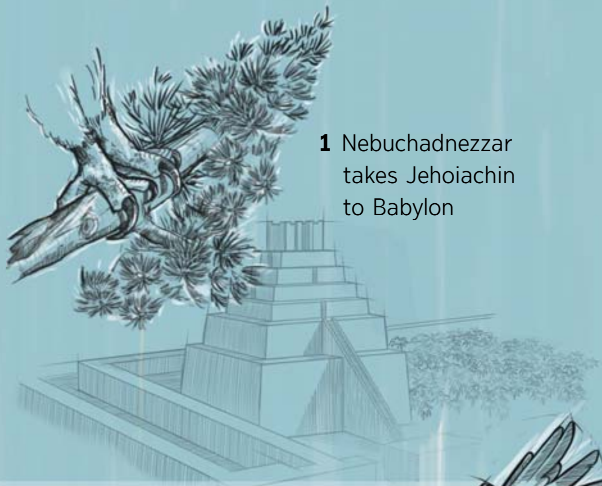
8A

Messianic Prophecy

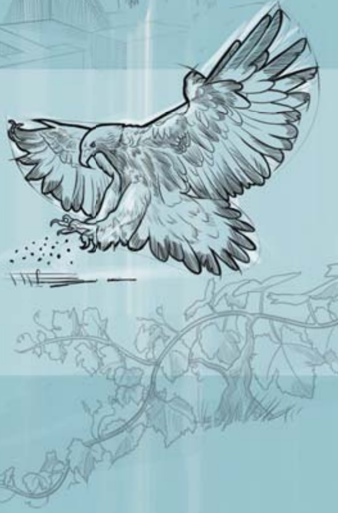
THE MAJESTIC CEDAR TREE

EZEKIEL 17:3-24

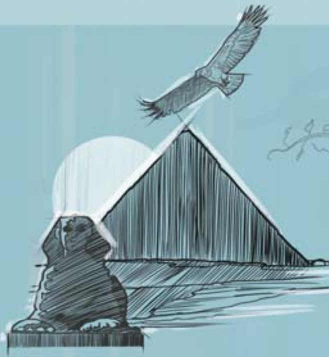
SEE PARAGRAPHS 4-11



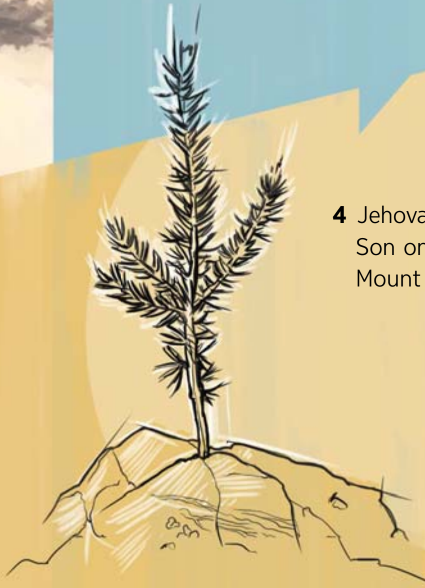
1 Nebuchadnezzar takes Jehoiachin to Babylon



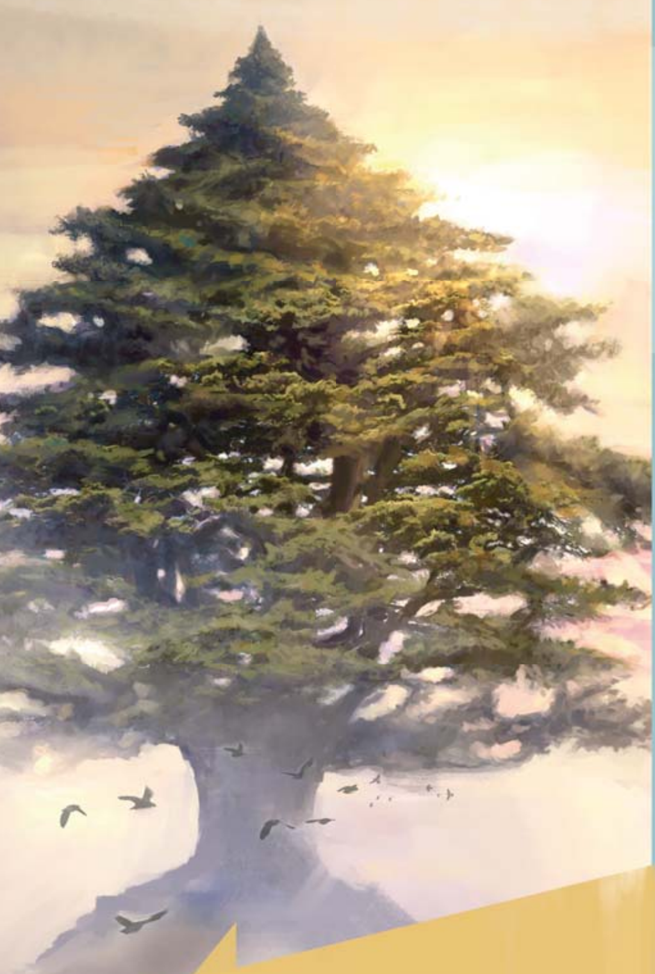
2 Nebuchadnezzar places Zedekiah on the throne in Jerusalem



3 Zedekiah rebels against Jehovah and turns to Egypt for military help



4 Jehovah plants his Son on heavenly Mount Zion



5 In the shade of Jesus' Kingdom rule, obedient humans will dwell in security put your trust in princes nor in a son of man, who cannot bring salvation."—Ps. 146:3.

8 There is, however, a ruler who is fully worthy of our confidence and trust. After presenting the prophetic riddle about the transplanted shoot, Jehovah drew on the same poetic imagery to describe the future Messianic Ruler.

9 *What the prophecy says.* **(Read Ezekiel 17:22-24.)** Now it is not great eagles but Jehovah himself who will take action. He will pluck a tender shoot "from the top of the lofty cedar and plant it . . . on a high and lofty mountain." This shoot will flourish, becoming "a majestic cedar" providing lodging for "every kind of bird." Then "all the trees of the field" will know that it is Jehovah himself who has made this majestic tree flourish.

10 *How the prophecy is fulfilled.* Jehovah plucked his Son, Jesus Christ, from the kingly line of David ("the lofty cedar") and planted him on heavenly Mount Zion ("a high and lofty mountain"). (Ps. 2:6; Jer. 23:5; Rev. 14:1) Jehovah thus took his Son, who was considered "the lowliest of men" by his enemies, and exalted him by giving him "the throne of David his father." (Dan. 4:17; Luke 1:32, 33) Like a majestic cedar, the Messianic King, Jesus Christ, will tower over the entire earth and be a source of blessing for all his subjects. Here, indeed, is the Ruler worthy of our trust. In the shade of Jesus' Kingdom rule, obedient humans earth wide will "dwell in security and be undisturbed by the dread of calamity." —Prov. 1:33.

11 *What we can learn from the prophecy.* The thrilling prophecy about the "tender shoot" that becomes "a majestic cedar" enables us to answer an all-important question: In whom will we place our trust? It is foolish to trust in human governments and their military might. To find real security, we are wise to place our full confidence and trust in the Messianic King, Jesus Christ. The heavenly government in his capable hands is mankind's only hope.—Rev. 11:15.

"The One Who Has the Legal Right"

12 From the divine explanation of the prophetic riddle about the two eagles, Ezekiel understood that Zedekiah, an unfaithful king in the royal line of David, would be dethroned and taken captive to Babylon. Perhaps the prophet wondered, 'What about God's covenant with David, which promised that

8-10. How did Jehovah describe the future Messianic Ruler, and how is the prophecy fulfilled? (See also the box "Messianic Prophecy—The Majestic Cedar Tree.")

11. What important lesson can we learn from the prophecy about the "tender shoot" that becomes "a majestic cedar"?

12. How did Jehovah make clear that he had not abandoned his covenant with David?

a king from David's family line would rule forever?' (2 Sam. 7:12, 16) If Ezekiel did ponder such a question, he did not have to wait long for an answer. About 611 B.C.E., in the seventh year of the exile, while Zedekiah was still ruling in Judah, "the word of Jehovah came" to Ezekiel. (Ezek. 20:2) Jehovah had him relate another Messianic prophecy, one that made clear that God had not abandoned his covenant with David. On the contrary, the prophecy indicated that *the future Messianic Ruler would have the legal right to rule as the heir of David.*

13, 14. What is the gist of the prophecy recorded at Ezekiel 21:25-27, and how is the prophecy fulfilled?

13 *What the prophecy says.* **(Read Ezekiel 21:25-27.)** In no uncertain terms, Jehovah through Ezekiel addresses the "wicked chieftain of Israel," whose time of punishment has arrived. Jehovah tells this wicked ruler that his "turban" and "crown," or diadem, (symbols of royal power) would be taken from him. Then, ruling powers that had been "low" would be raised up, and those that had been "high" would be brought

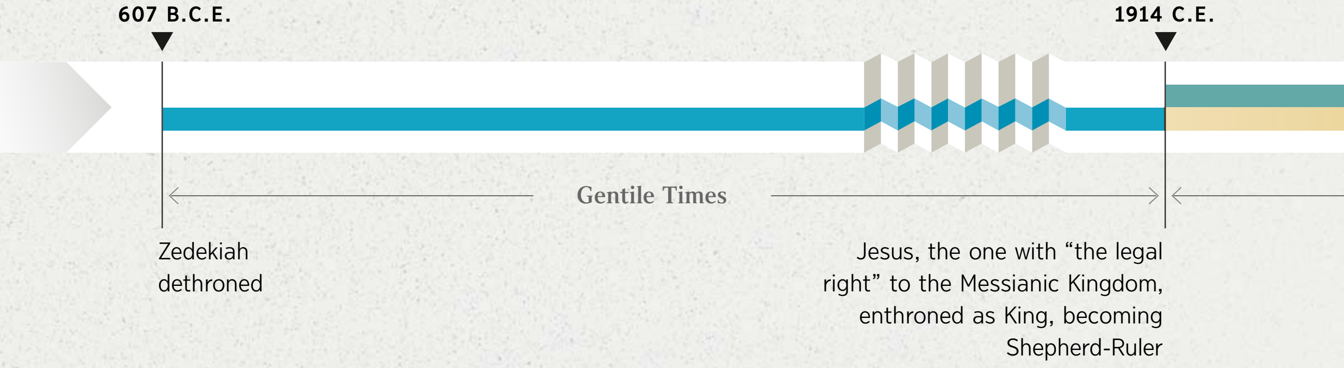
8B

THREE MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

1 "The One Who Has the Legal Right"

EZEKIEL 21:25-27

SEE PARAGRAPHS 12-15


607 B.C.E.
1914 C.E.
Gentile Times
Zedekiah dethroned
Jesus, the one with "the legal right" to the Messianic Kingdom, enthroned as King, becoming Shepherd-Ruler

low. The ruling powers raised up hold sway, but only until “the one who has the legal right comes,” and then Jehovah gives that one the Kingdom.

14 *How the prophecy is fulfilled.* In 607 B.C.E., with the destruction of Jerusalem, the “high” kingdom of Judah centered in Jerusalem was brought low when the Babylonians destroyed that city and took captive the dethroned King Zedekiah. Then, with no king in David’s royal line ruling in Jerusalem, the “low” Gentile powers were raised up, leaving them in control of the earth—but only for a limited period of time. The Gentile Times, or “the appointed times of the nations,” ended in 1914 when Jehovah conferred kingship on Jesus Christ. (Luke 21:24) As a descendant of King David, Jesus indeed had “the legal right” to the Messianic Kingdom.[2] (Gen. 49:10) Hence, in Jesus, Jehovah fulfilled his solemn promise to give David a permanent heir to an everlasting Kingdom.—Luke 1:32, 33.

2 “My Servant . . . Will Feed Them and Become Their Shepherd”

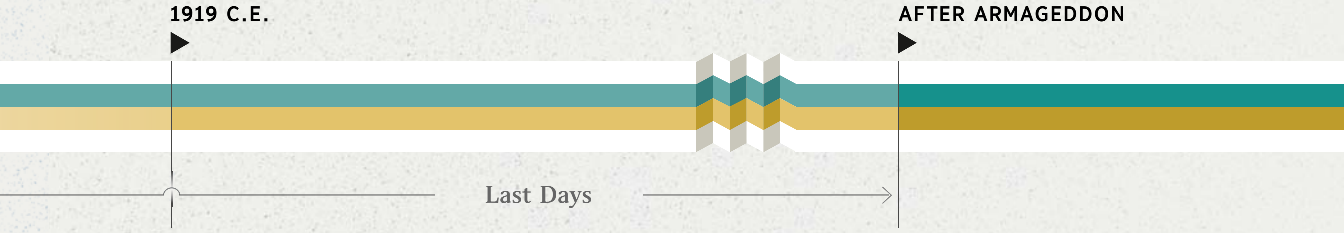
EZEKIEL 34:22-24

SEE PARAGRAPHS 18-22

3 “One King Will Rule Over All of Them” Forever

EZEKIEL 37:22, 24-28

SEE PARAGRAPHS 23-26



The faithful and discreet slave appointed to shepherd God’s sheep

Faithful anointed ones brought together under the Messianic King; later united with a great crowd

The blessings of the King’s rule will last forever

FOOTNOTE

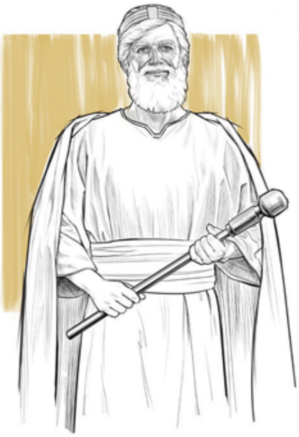
[2] Jesus’ line of descent from David is well-documented in the inspired Gospels.—Matt. 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-31.

15. Why can we have the utmost confidence in the King, Jesus Christ?

16. How does Jehovah feel about his sheep, and how were "the shepherds of Israel" in Ezekiel's day treating the flock?

17. How did Jehovah rescue his sheep?

18, 19. What prophecy did Ezekiel relate in 606 B.C.E.? (See opening picture.)



Jesus has the legal right to be King of God's Kingdom

SEE PARAGRAPH 15

15 *What we can learn from the prophecy.* We can have the utmost confidence in the King, Jesus Christ. Why? Because unlike worldly rulers who may be elected by humans or may usurp ruling authority, Jesus was chosen by Jehovah and "given . . . a kingdom" to which he has the legal right. (Dan. 7:13, 14) Surely the King whom Jehovah himself has appointed deserves our confidence!

"My Servant David" Will "Become Their Shepherd"

16 Jehovah, the Supreme Shepherd, deeply cares about the welfare of his sheep—his earthly worshippers. (Ps. 100:3) When he entrusts the care of his sheep to human undershepherds—those in positions of authority—he closely watches how they treat his sheep. Imagine, then, how Jehovah must have felt about "the shepherds of Israel" in Ezekiel's day. Those leaders shamelessly ruled "with harshness and tyranny." As a result, the flock suffered, with many abandoning pure worship.—Ezek. 34:1-6.

17 What would Jehovah do? "I will demand an accounting," he said to the harsh rulers of Israel. He further promised: "I will rescue my sheep." (Ezek. 34:10) Jehovah always proves true to his word. (Josh. 21:45) In 607 B.C.E., he rescued his sheep by using the invading Babylonians to strip those selfish shepherds of rulership. Seventy years later, he rescued his sheeplike worshippers from Babylon and brought them back to their homeland so that they could restore true worship there. But Jehovah's sheep remained vulnerable, for they would continue under the domination of worldly powers. "The appointed times of the nations" would run for many more centuries.—Luke 21:24.

18 Back in 606 B.C.E., about a year after Jerusalem's destruction and decades before the Israelites were delivered from Babylonian exile, Jehovah inspired Ezekiel to relate a prophecy that reflects how deeply the Supreme Shepherd cares about the eternal welfare of his sheep. The prophecy describes *how the Messianic Ruler will shepherd Jehovah's sheep.*

19 *What the prophecy says.* **(Read Ezekiel 34:22-24.)** God "will raise up one shepherd," whom he calls "my servant David." The words "one shepherd" along with the singular use of "servant" imply that the Ruler would not revive a dynasty of kings in David's line but would be the one *permanent* heir of David. The Shepherd-Ruler will feed God's sheep and become “a chieftain among them.” Jehovah will “make a covenant of peace” with his sheep. “Blessings will pour down [on them] like the rains,” and they will experience a delightful condition of security, refreshing prosperity, and fruitfulness. Why, peace will prevail not only among humans but also between humans and animals!—Ezek. 34:25-28.

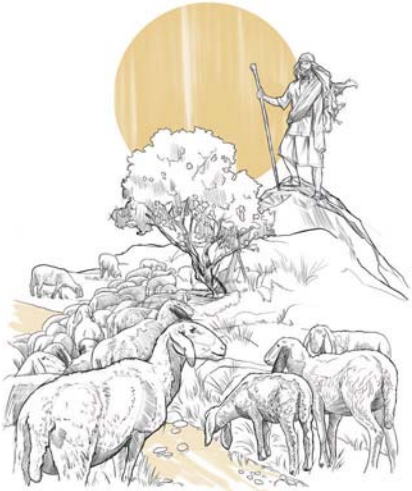
20 *How the prophecy is fulfilled.* By calling this Ruler “my servant David,” God pointed prophetically to Jesus, the descendant of David who has the legal right to rule. (Ps. 89:35, 36) When on earth, Jesus proved to be “the fine shepherd,” giving his life “in behalf of the sheep.” (John 10:14, 15) But now he is a heavenly Shepherd. (Heb. 13:20) In 1914, God installed Jesus as King and entrusted him with the responsibility to shepherd and feed God’s sheep on earth. Shortly afterward, in 1919, the newly enthroned King appointed “the faithful and discreet slave” to feed the “domestics”—God’s loyal worshippers who have the heavenly or the earthly hope. (Matt. 24:45-47) Under Christ’s direction, the faithful slave has kept God’s sheep well-fed with spiritual food. This food has helped them to promote peace and security in the spiritual paradise that is now taking shape.

21 What do Ezekiel’s words about “a covenant of peace” and rains of blessings mean for the future? In the coming new world, Jehovah’s pure worshippers on earth will experience to the full the blessings of the “covenant of peace.” In a literal, global paradise, faithful humans will never again be threatened by war, crime, famine, sickness, or wild animals. (Isa. 11:6-9; 35:5, 6; 65:21-23) Are you not thrilled at the prospect of everlasting life on a paradise earth where God’s sheep will “dwell in security, with no one to make them afraid”?—Ezek. 34:28.

22 *What we can learn from the prophecy.* Like his Father, Jesus deeply cares about the welfare of the sheep. The Shepherd-King sees to it that his Father’s sheep are well-fed spiritually and that they enjoy peace and security in the spiritual paradise. How reassuring it is to be under the care of such a Ruler! Those serving as undershepherds need to reflect Jesus’ concern for the sheep. Elders are to shepherd the flock “willingly” and “eagerly” and to be examples that the sheep can imitate. (1 Pet. 5:2, 3) Never would an elder want to mistreat one of Jehovah’s sheep! Remember Jehovah’s words to the harsh shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel’s day: “I will demand an

20, 21. (a) How is the prophecy about “my servant David” fulfilled? (b) What do Ezekiel’s words about “a covenant of peace” mean for the future?

22. How does Jesus feel about the sheep, and how can those serving as undershepherds reflect his concern?



As a heavenly Shepherd, Jesus observes how God’s sheep are treated

SEE PARAGRAPH 22

Jehovah blesses his worshippers' loving global brotherhood

SEE PARAGRAPH 26

accounting." (Ezek. 34:10) The Supreme Shepherd keeps a close eye on how his sheep are treated—and so does his Son.

"David My Servant Will Be Their Chieftain Forever"

23. What promise did Jehovah make regarding unifying the nation of Israel, and how did he fulfill it?

24. How does Jehovah describe the Messianic Ruler, and what will this King's rule be like?

23 Jehovah wants his worshippers to serve together in unity. In a prophecy about restoration, God promised that he would gather his people—representatives of both the two-tribe kingdom of Judah and the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel—and reunite them as "one nation," as if causing two "sticks" to "become one" in his hand. (Ezek. 37:15-23) In a fulfillment of the prophecy, God restored a united nation of Israel to the Promised Land in 537 B.C.E.[3] But that unity was only a token of a far grander and more lasting unity to come. After promising to unify Israel, Jehovah gave Ezekiel a prophecy about how *the future Ruler would bring true worshippers together earth wide in a bond of unity that would last forever.*

24 *What the prophecy says.* **(Read Ezekiel 37:24-28.)** Jehovah once again refers to the Messianic Ruler as "my servant David," "one shepherd," and "chieftain," but now Jehovah

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FOOTNOTE

[3] Ezekiel's prophecy about two sticks and how it was fulfilled will be discussed in Chapter 12 of this publication.

DON'T GIVE UP!

also calls this Promised One a “king.” (Ezek. 37:22) What will this King’s rulership be like? *His rule will be permanent.* The use of the terms “forever” and “eternal” suggest that there will be no end to the blessings of the King’s rule.[4] *His rule will be marked by unity.* Under their “one king,” loyal subjects will follow the same “judicial decisions,” and “they will dwell on the land” together. *His rule will bring the King’s subjects closer to Jehovah God.* Jehovah will make “a covenant of peace” with these subjects. Jehovah will be their God, and they will be his people. And his sanctuary will be “in their midst forever.”

25 *How the prophecy is fulfilled.* In 1919, faithful anointed ones were united under their “one shepherd,” the Messianic King, Jesus Christ. Later, “a great crowd” from “all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues” became united with their anointed fellow believers. (Rev. 7:9) Together, they have become “one flock” under “one shepherd.” (John 10:16) Whether their hope is heavenly or earthly, they all obediently walk in Jehovah’s judicial decisions. As a result, they dwell together in a spiritual paradise as a united worldwide brotherhood.

25. How is the prophecy about the Messianic King fulfilled?

FOOTNOTE

[4] Regarding the Hebrew term rendered “forever” and “eternal,” one reference work notes: “Along with the sense of duration, the word bears nuances of permanence, durability, inviolability, irrevocability, and immutability.”

Jehovah has blessed them with peace, and his sanctuary, representing pure worship, is among them. Jehovah is their God, and they are proud to be his worshippers—now and forever!

26. How can you contribute to the unity of the spiritual paradise?

27. (a) How do you feel about the Messianic prophecies in the book of Ezekiel? (b) What will we examine in the chapters that follow?

26 *What we can learn from the prophecy.* We are privileged to be united in a worldwide brotherhood engaged in the pure worship of Jehovah. But that privilege brings with it a responsibility—we must contribute to the unity. Hence, all of us need to do our part to maintain harmony of belief and of action. (1 Cor. 1:10) To that end, we eagerly feed on the same spiritual food, hold to the same Scriptural standards of conduct, and share in the same vital work of Kingdom-preaching and disciple-making. The real key to our unity, however, is love. As we strive to cultivate and display love in its many facets—including empathy, compassion, and forgiveness—we contribute to our unity. "Love," the Bible says, "is a perfect bond of union."—Col. 3:12-14; 1 Cor. 13:4-7.

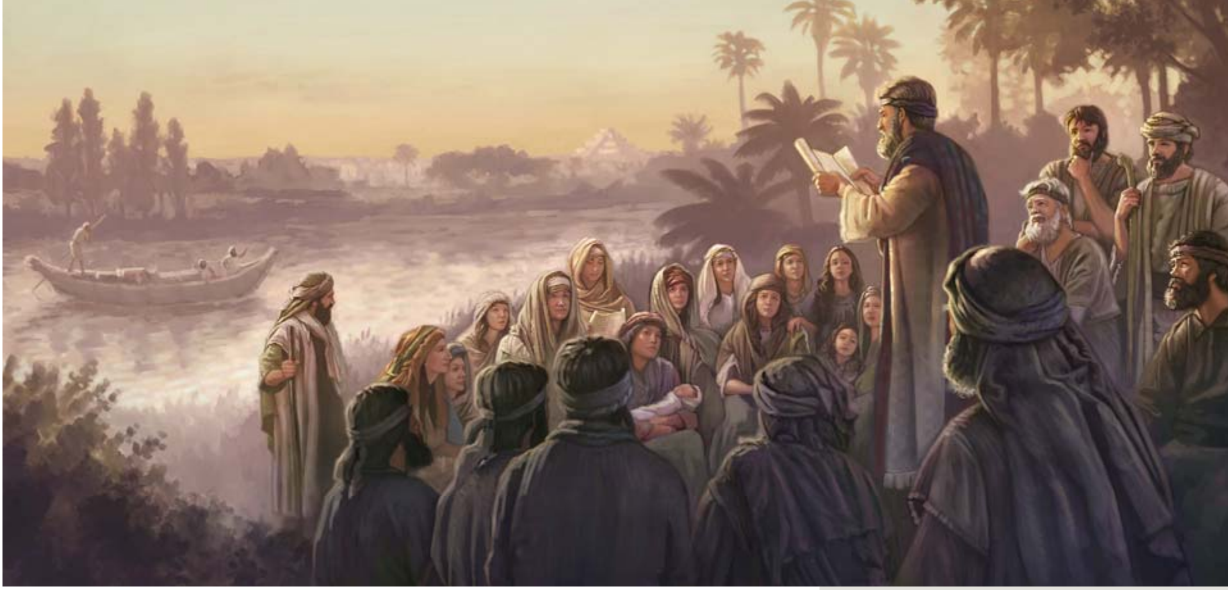
27 How thankful we are for the Messianic prophecies found in the book of Ezekiel! Reading and meditating on those prophecies teaches us that our beloved King, Jesus Christ, deserves our trust, has the legal right to rule, tenderly shepherds us, and will preserve us in a bond of unity that will last forever. How privileged we are to be subjects of the Messianic King! Let us remember that these Messianic prophecies are part of an overall theme of restoration that is developed in the Bible book of Ezekiel. Jesus is the one through whom Jehovah collects together His people and restores pure worship among them. (Ezek. 20:41) In the following chapters of this publication, we will examine that thrilling theme of restoration and how it is developed in the book of Ezekiel.

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 What lesson did you learn from the prophetic riddle about the great eagles? (Ezek. 17:3-10)

2 Explain how the Messianic prophecies found in Ezekiel give you sound reasons to trust in the King, Jesus Christ.

3 How can you contribute to the peace and unity of the spiritual paradise?



9

“I WILL GIVE THEM A UNIFIED HEART”

EZEKIEL 11:19

FOCUS: *The theme of restoration and how it is developed in Ezekiel’s prophecies*

1-3. How do the Babylonians ridicule worshippers of Jehovah, and why?

IMAGINE that you are a faithful Jew living in the city of Babylon. Your people have been in exile for half a century or so. As is your custom on the Sabbath day, you are going to meet with fellow believers to worship Jehovah. Making your way through the bustling streets, you pass imposing temples as well as shrines beyond counting. The people throng to those places, making offerings and singing hymns to such deities as Marduk.

2 Away from the crowds, you meet your little group of fellow worshippers.[1] You find a quiet spot—perhaps by one of the city’s canals—to pray, sing psalms, and reflect on God’s Word together. As you join in prayer, you can hear the gentle creaking of the wooden barges moored along the canal’s edge. You are relieved that there is a measure of peace here. You hope that none of the local people find you and disrupt the meeting as they often do. Why do they do that?

FOOTNOTE

[1] Most of the Jewish exiles lived in settlements some distance from the city of Babylon. Ezekiel, for example, lived among the Jews by the river Chebar. (Ezek. 3:15) However, there were a few Jewish exiles who lived in the city itself. Their number included “those of royal and noble descent.”—Dan. 1:3, 6; 2 Ki. 24:15.

4, 5. What hope did Ezekiel's prophecy offer, and what will we consider in this chapter? (See opening picture.)

6. How had God repeatedly warned his rebellious people?

7. In what ways did Jehovah bring punishment on his people?

3 Babylon has a long record of winning wars, and the people attribute the city's strength to their false gods. To the Babylonians, the utter destruction of Jerusalem proves that their god Marduk is stronger than Jehovah! Hence, they ridicule your God and his people. Sometimes they mockingly demand: "Sing for us one of the songs of Zion"! (Ps. 137:3) Many psalms celebrate Zion's triumphs over Jehovah's enemies. Perhaps the Babylonians love to mock those psalms in particular. Other psalms, though, speak about the Babylonians themselves. One, for example, says: "They have turned Jerusalem into a heap of ruins. . . . Those around us ridicule and jeer us."—Ps. 79:1, 3, 4.

4 There are also apostate Jews, who are quick to ridicule your faith in Jehovah and in his prophets. Regardless of such mockery, pure worship brings comfort to you and your family. It feels good to pray and to sing together. Reading God's Word is soothing. (Ps. 94:19; Rom. 15:4) Imagine that on this day, one of your fellow worshippers has brought something special to the gathering—a scroll containing Ezekiel's prophecy. You love to hear Jehovah's promise that he will restore his people to their homeland. Your heart soars as such a prophecy is read aloud, and you contemplate the hope that you and your family may someday return and help in that thrilling time of restoration!

5 Ezekiel's prophecy rings again and again with promises of restoration. Let us examine that hopeful theme. How were those promises fulfilled for the exiles? What meaning do such prophecies have in modern times? In some cases, we will also consider a final fulfillment in the future.

"They Will Go Into Exile, Into Captivity"

6 Through Ezekiel, Jehovah communicated clearly to his people how he would punish them for their rebellious course. "They will go into exile, into captivity," Jehovah said. (Ezek. 12:11) As we saw in Chapter 6 of this publication, Ezekiel even acted out that sentence. But his was not the first such warning. Since the days of Moses, nearly a millennium earlier, Jehovah had warned his people that if they persisted in a rebellious course, they would suffer exile. (Deut. 28:36, 37) Such prophets as Isaiah and Jeremiah had given similar warnings.—Isa. 39:5-7; Jer. 20:3-6.

7 Sadly, though, those warnings largely fell on deaf ears. In time, Jehovah came to feel brokenhearted over his people's rebellion, their idolatry, their unfaithfulness, and their corruption under the influence of bad shepherds. He thus allowed them to suffer famine—which was a disaster and a disgrace, considering that their land had been "one flowing with milk and honey." (Ezek. 20:6, 7) Then, as he had long foretold, Jehovah allowed his wayward people to be punished with exile. In 607 B.C.E., Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon struck the final blow, destroying Jerusalem and her temple. Many thousands of the surviving Jews were carried off into exile in Babylon. There they suffered the mockery and opposition described at the outset of this chapter.

8, 9. How did God provide the Christian congregation with warnings against apostasy?

10, 11. Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds saw what fulfillment from the second century C.E. onward?

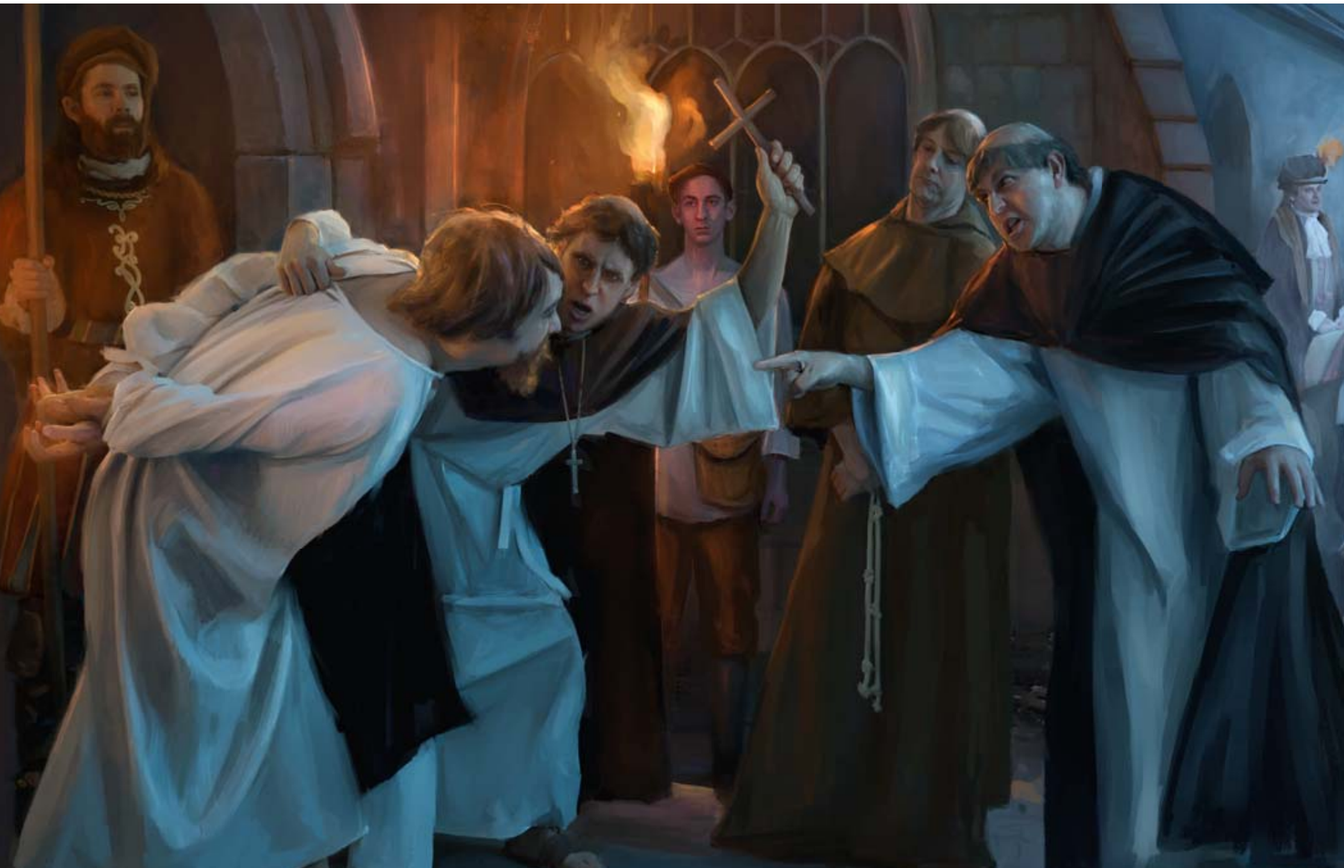
8 Did something similar to the Babylonian exile befall the Christian congregation? It did indeed! Like the Jews of ancient times, Christ's followers were warned ahead of time. Early in his ministry, Jesus said: "Be on the watch for the false prophets who come to you in sheep's covering, but inside they are ravenous wolves." (Matt. 7:15) Years later, the apostle Paul was inspired to issue a similar warning: "I know that after my going away oppressive wolves will enter in among you and will not treat the flock with tenderness, and from among you yourselves men will rise and speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves."—Acts 20:29, 30.

9 Christians were taught how to identify and avoid such dangerous men. Christian elders were instructed to remove apostates from the congregation. (1 Tim. 1:19; 2 Tim. 2:16-19; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 2 John 10) Nonetheless, as was the case with Israel and Judah of old, many Christians gradually turned a deaf ear to loving warnings. By the end of the first century, apostasy had taken root in the congregation. John, the last of the apostles still living at the close of the first century C.E., observed that the congregation was suffering such corruption and widespread rebellion. He was the only remaining restraint against that wicked trend. (2 Thess. 2:6-8; 1 John 2:18) What happened after John died?

10 After John's death, Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds began to see fulfillment. **(Read Matthew 13:24-30.)** As Jesus had foreseen, Satan oversowed the congregation with "weeds," or imitation Christians, and the corruption of the congregation sped up. How heartbroken Jehovah must have been to see the congregation his Son had founded become polluted with idolatry, pagan holidays and practices, and false doctrines adopted from godless philosophers and satanic religions! What did Jehovah do? As he had done

with unfaithful Israel, he let his people be taken into exile. From sometime in the second century C.E. onward, the wheatlike ones were lost among the imitation Christians. The true Christian congregation was, in effect, in exile in Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion, whereas the imitation Christians were absorbed by that corrupt empire. As the imitation Christians flourished, Christendom came into being.

11 Throughout the dark centuries of Christendom's dominance, there were some genuine Christians, the "wheat" of Jesus' parable. Like the Jewish exiles described at Ezekiel 6:9, they remembered the true God. Some courageously opposed the false doctrines of Christendom. They faced mockery and persecution. Did Jehovah intend to forsake his people permanently in that realm of spiritual darkness? No! As was the case with Israel of old, Jehovah's anger was expressed to the proper degree and for the right amount of time. (Jer. 46:28) Furthermore, Jehovah did not leave his people without hope. Let us return to those Jewish exiles in ancient Bab-



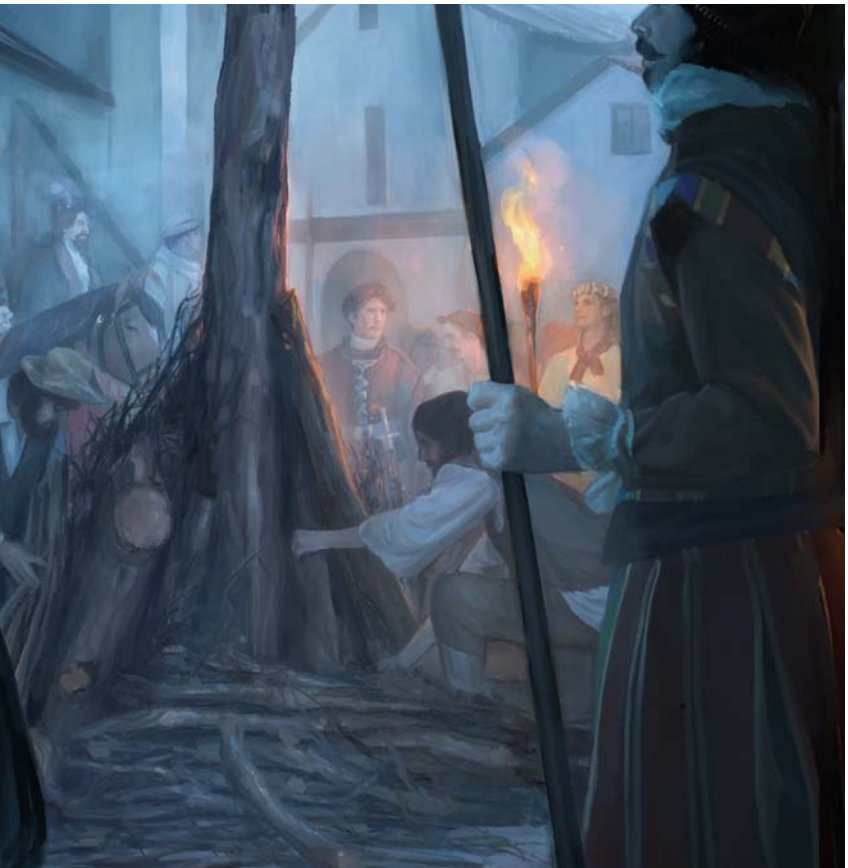
ylon and see how Jehovah gave them hope for an end to their captivity.

12, 13. Why would Jehovah's anger against his exiled people of Ezekiel's day eventually subside?

"My Anger Will Come to an End"

12 Jehovah was forthright about his anger toward his people, but he also reassured them that his righteous indignation would not last forever. Note, for instance, these words: "My anger will come to an end, and my wrath against them will subside, and I will be satisfied. And they will have to know that I, Jehovah, have spoken in my insistence on exclusive devotion, when I have finished unleashing my wrath against them." (Ezek. 5:13) Why would Jehovah's wrath eventually subside?

13 Among the captives were faithful Jews who were taken into exile along with their unfaithful counterparts. In addition, through Ezekiel, God foretold that some of His people would repent while in exile. Those remorseful Jews would recount the shameful things that they had done in rebellion against their God, and they would implore Jehovah for forgiveness and favor. (Ezek. 6:8-10; 12:16) Ezekiel was among



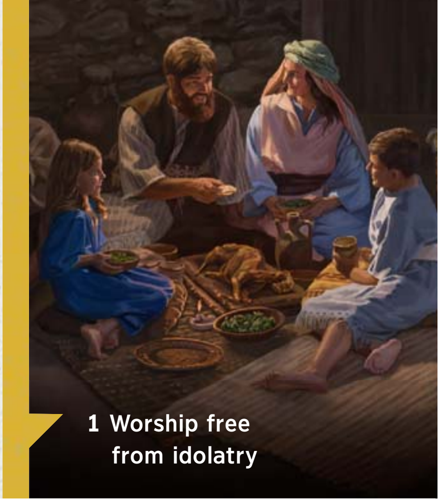
For centuries, true Christians faced persecution at the hands of Babylon the Great

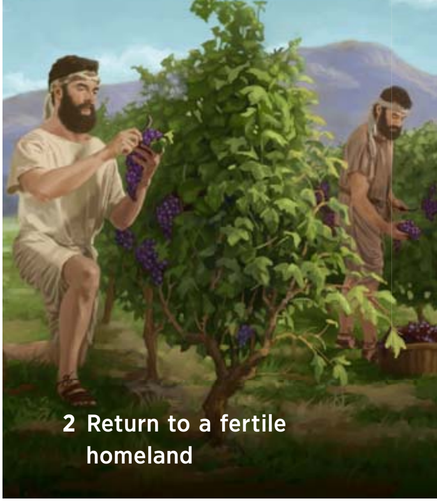
SEE PARAGRAPHS 10, 11

9A

Jehovah Keeps His Promises
ANCIENT TIMES

SEE PARAGRAPHS 15-19


1 Worship free from idolatry


2 Return to a fertile homeland

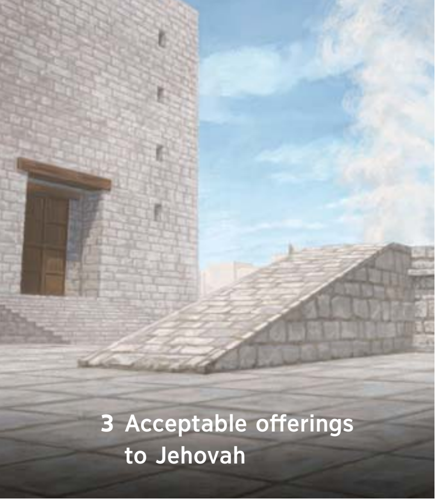
14. Why would Jehovah restore his people to their homeland?

15. What change would be made in the religious practices of the returnees?

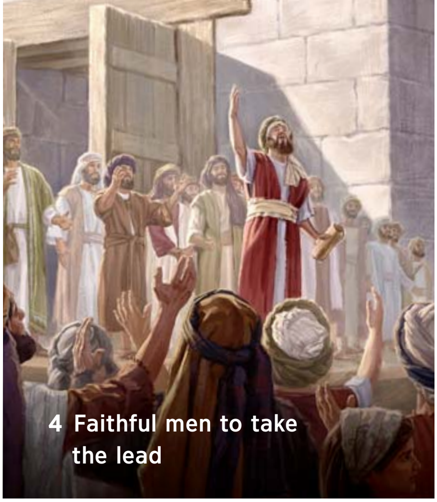
the faithful ones, as were the prophet Daniel and his three companions. In fact, Daniel lived long enough to see both the beginning and the end of the exile. His heartfelt prayer of repentance over the sins of Israel is recorded in Daniel chapter 9. No doubt his sentiments represented the feelings of many thousands of exiles who longed for Jehovah's forgiveness and renewed blessings. How thrilling, then, were Ezekiel's inspired promises of release and restoration!

14 There was, however, a more important factor in the release and restoration of Jehovah's people. Their long exile would end, not because they deserved liberation, but because it was again Jehovah's time to sanctify his own name before all the nations. (Ezek. 36:22) Those Babylonians would know once and for all that their demonic gods, such as Marduk, were no match for the Sovereign Lord Jehovah! Let us consider five promises that Jehovah inspired Ezekiel to share with his fellow exiles. First, let us discuss what each promise would have meant to those faithful ones. Then, we will see how those promises saw a greater fulfillment.

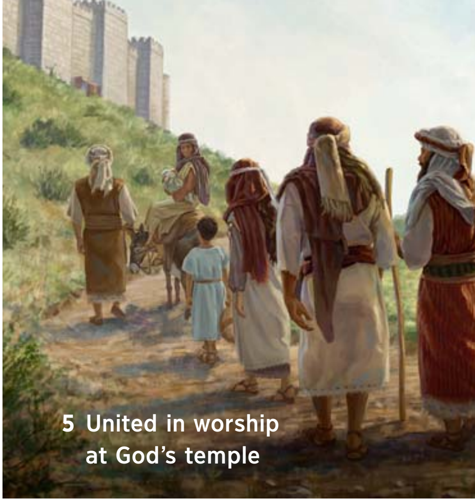
15 **PROMISE 1.** *No more idolatry or other disgusting practices associated with false religion.* **(Read Ezekiel 11:18; 12:24.)** As discussed in Chapter 5 of this publication, Jerusalem and her temple had been polluted with false religious practices, such as idolatry. The people were thus corrupt, alienated from Jehovah. Through Ezekiel, Jehovah foretold that the exiles could look forward to a time when they would once again take part in worship that was clean and undefiled. All other blessings of the restoration would depend on this primary matter: the restoration of God's arrangement for pure worship.



3 Acceptable offerings to Jehovah



4 Faithful men to take the lead



5 United in worship at God's temple

[16] **PROMISE 2.** *A return to their homeland.* "I will give you the land of Israel," Jehovah told the exiles. (Ezek. 11:17) This was a remarkable promise, for the Babylonians, who taunted God's captive people, surely never gave them any hope of returning to their beloved homeland. (Isa. 14:4, 17) Moreover, as long as the returnees remained faithful, the land would prove fertile and productive, supporting them and providing useful work. The disgrace and misery of famine would remain a thing of the past.—**Read Ezekiel 36:30.**

[17] **PROMISE 3.** *The resuming of gift offerings at Jehovah's altar.* As noted in Chapter 2 of this publication, under the Law, sacrifices and offerings formed a vital part of pure worship. As long as the returning exiles remained obedient and spiritually clean, their offerings would be acceptable to Jehovah. The people could thus find atonement for their sins and remain close to their God. Jehovah promised: "The whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve me in the land. I will take pleasure in them there, and I will require your contributions and the firstfruits of your offerings, all your holy things." (Ezek. 20:40) Pure worship would truly be restored, bringing blessings to God's people.

[18] **PROMISE 4.** *The sifting out of bad shepherds.* A key reason why God's people went so wrong was the influence of corrupt men who took the lead. Jehovah promised to change that. Regarding such bad shepherds, he promised: "I will dismiss them from feeding my sheep . . . I will rescue my sheep from their mouth." In contrast, Jehovah assured his faithful people: "I will care for my sheep." (Ezek. 34:10, 12) How would he do so? He would use faithful, loyal men as shepherds.

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16. Jehovah made what promise regarding his people's homeland?

17. What would happen regarding sacrifices to Jehovah?

18. How would Jehovah shepherd his people?

19. What did Jehovah promise regarding unity?

20, 21. How were God's promises fulfilled on the returning exiles?

19 **PROMISE 5.** *Unity among worshippers of Jehovah.* Imagine how distressing it was for faithful worshippers to see disunity among God's people before the exile. Influenced by false prophets and corrupt shepherds, the people rebelled against the faithful prophets who represented Jehovah; the people even broke into opposing factions. Thus, one of the most appealing features of the restoration was this promise through Ezekiel: "I will give them a unified heart, and I will put a new spirit in them." (Ezek. 11:19) As long as the returning Jews remained at unity with Jehovah God and with one another, no opposer could defeat them. As a nation, they could once again bring glory to Jehovah instead of reproach and dishonor.

20 Were those five promises fulfilled on the Jews who returned from exile? We do well to remember the words of faithful Joshua of old: "Not one word out of all the good promises that Jehovah your God has spoken to you has failed. They have all come true for you. Not one word of them has

A landmark convention in 1919 provided powerful evidence that God's people were finally freed from Babylon the Great

9B

WHY 1919?

Why do we say that God's people were freed from bondage to Babylon the Great in 1919? A combination of Bible prophecy and the facts of history helps us arrive at that conclusion.

Bible prophecy and history show conclusively that Jesus began reigning as King in heaven in 1914, signaling the start of the last days of Satan's system here on earth. What did Jesus do upon becoming King? Did he immediately free his earthly servants from bondage to Babylon the Great? Did he appoint his "faithful and discreet slave" in 1914 and begin in the great work of the harvest?—Matt. 24:45.

Evidently not. Remember, the apostle Peter was inspired to note that judgment would "start with the house of God." (1 Pet. 4:17) In a similar vein, the prophet Malachi foretold the time when Jehovah would come to His house of worship accompanied by "the messenger of the covenant," the Son of God. (Mal. 3:1-5) That time would be a period of refinement and testing. Does history harmonize with those prophetic indications?

failed." (Josh. 23:14) So it was in Joshua's day; so it had to be in the days of the exiles who returned to their homeland.

21 The Jews gave up idolatry and the other disgusting practices of false religion that had alienated them from Jehovah. Against all likelihood, they resumed living in their homeland, cultivating it and enjoying productive lives there. One of the first things they did was to restore Jehovah's altar in Jerusalem and make acceptable offerings there. (Ezra 3:2-6) Jehovah blessed them with fine spiritual shepherds, such men as the faithful priest and copyist Ezra, governors Nehemiah and Zerubbabel, High Priest Joshua, and the courageous prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. As long as the people remained responsive to spiritual direction and guidance, they enjoyed a unity unlike any they had known in a long, long time.—Isa. 61:1-4; **read Jeremiah 3:15.**

22 Without question, the initial fulfillment of Jehovah's restoration promises was encouraging! Still, that fulfillment was really only a foregleam of something much greater. How do

22. How do we know that the initial fulfillment of the restoration prophecies was only a foregleam of something greater?

It certainly does! The period of 1914 to early 1919 was a difficult time of tests and refinement for the Bible Students, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then known. In 1914 many of God's people on earth were disappointed when the end of the system did not arrive as they had hoped. Disappointment deepened in 1916, with the death of Charles T. Russell, who had been taking a dynamic lead among God's people. Some who were overly attached to Brother Russell actively resisted the efforts of Joseph F. Rutherford, who succeeded Russell in taking the lead. Divisions erupted and almost split the organization in 1917. Then, in 1918, evidently at the instigation of the clergy, Brother Rutherford and seven of his associates were tried, wrongly convicted, and sent to prison. Headquarters in Brooklyn closed down. Clearly, God's people were not yet freed from Babylon the Great!

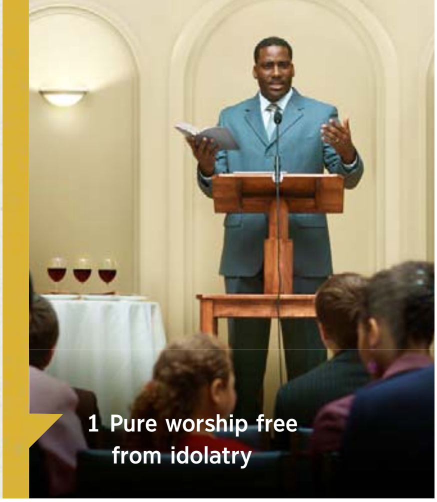
What happened in 1919, however? Why, things turned around with almost dizzying swiftness! Early in the year, Rutherford and his associates were released from prison. And they got right back to work! Within short order, a landmark convention was planned, and the publication of a new journal, *The Golden Age,* (now *Awake!*) was under way. The new journal was designed for campaigns in the public ministry. Additionally, in each congregation an overseer was appointed to organize and promote the ministry. That same year, the *Bulletin* (now *Our Christian Life and Ministry—Meeting Workbook*) was published to help in organizing the preaching work.

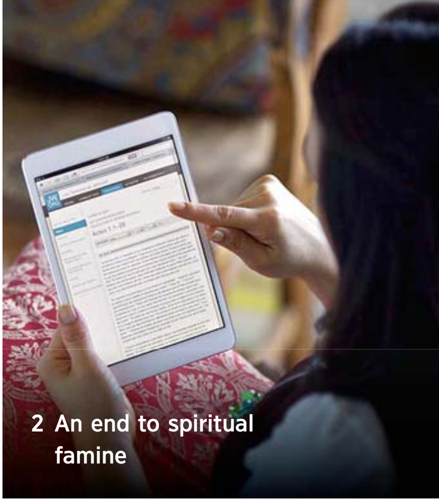
What had happened? Clearly, Christ had freed his people from captivity to Babylon the Great. He had appointed his faithful and discreet slave. The work of harvesting was under way. Ever since that pivotal year of 1919, the work has forged ahead to an astounding degree.

9C

Jehovah Keeps His Promises MODERN TIMES

SEE PARAGRAPHS 27-31


1 Pure worship free from idolatry


2 An end to spiritual famine

23, 24. When and how did “the times of restoration of all things” begin?

25, 26. (a) When did the long exile in Babylon the Great come to an end, and how do we know? (See also the box “Why 1919?”) (b) What began to see fulfillment from 1919 onward?

we know that? Well, the promises were conditional; Jehovah would fulfill them only to the extent that the people remained obedient and responsive. In time, the Jews again became disobedient and rebellious. But as Joshua pointed out, Jehovah’s word always comes true. So the promises would see a greater, more lasting fulfillment. Let us see how that came about.

“I Will Take Pleasure in You”

23 As students of the Bible, we know that this wicked system of things entered its final decline, its last days, in 1914. For servants of Jehovah, though, this is not an era of sad decline. In fact, the Bible indicates that 1914 saw the beginning of a thrilling period—“the times of restoration of all things.” (Acts 3:21) How do we know that? Well, what happened in heaven in 1914? Jesus Christ was enthroned as the Messianic King! How was that event a restoration? Remember, Jehovah had promised King David that kingship in his family line would endure forever. (1 Chron. 17:11-14) That kingship was interrupted in 607 B.C.E. when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and ended the rule of the Davidic kings.

24 As “the Son of man,” Jesus was a descendant of David and thus became the legal heir to the Davidic kingship. (Matt. 1:1; 16:13-16; Luke 1:32, 33) In 1914 when Jehovah granted Jesus the heavenly throne, “the times of restoration of all things” began! Now the way was open for Jehovah to use that perfect King to continue the work of restoration.

25 One of Christ’s early actions as King was to join his Father in an inspection of the arrangement for pure worship on

3 Sacrifices of praise offered

4 Faithful men to take the lead

5 Global unity of worship

the earth. (Mal. 3:1-5) As Jesus had foretold in his illustration of the wheat and the weeds, it had long been impossible to distinguish wheat from weeds, genuine anointed Christians from impostors.[2] Now, though, the harvest season arrived in 1914, and the distinction was clear. For decades leading up to 1914, faithful Bible Students had been exposing the gross errors of Christendom and were beginning to separate themselves from that corrupt organization. It was Jehovah's time to restore them fully. So in early 1919, just a few years into "the harvest season," God's people were set completely free from captivity in Babylon the Great. (Matt. 13:30) The exile was over!

26 The restoration prophecies of Ezekiel began to see a fulfillment far greater than any that God's people had seen back in ancient times. Let us now consider how the five promises we have already examined have seen a greater fulfillment.

27 **PROMISE 1.** *An end of idolatry and other disgusting religious practices.* At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, faithful Christians were gathering together and were beginning to discard false religious practices. Veneration of a triune God, belief in the immortality of the human soul, and the hellfire doctrine were all cast aside as unscriptural teachings with roots in false religion. The use of images in worship was exposed as outright idolatry. Gradually, God's people also came to see the use of the cross in worship as a form of idolatry.—Ezek. 14:6.

28 **PROMISE 2.** *A restoration to the spiritual land of God's people.* As they left Babylonish religion behind, faithful Christians found themselves in their proper spiritual land, a

27. How did God cleanse his people of idolatry?

28. In what sense were Jehovah's people restored to their land?

FOOTNOTE

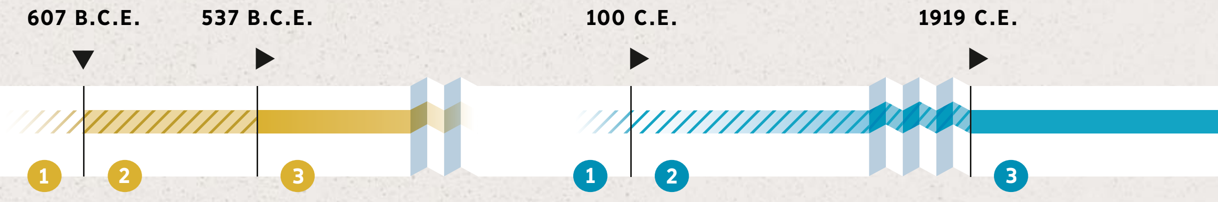
[2] For example, we cannot confirm which of the Reformers of the 16th century may have been anointed Christians.

9D

PROPHECIES OF CAPTIVITY AND RESTORATION

SEE PARAGRAPHS 6-11, 25-32

Many prophecies about the captivity of the Jewish people in ancient Babylon saw a second, greater fulfillment in the much later captivity of the Christian congregation in Babylon the Great. Note some examples.



	1. WARNINGS	2. CAPTIVITY	3. RESTORATION
FIRST FULFILLMENT	**Before 607 B.C.E.**—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel warn Jehovah's people; yet, apostasy still flourishes	**607 B.C.E.**—Jerusalem destroyed; God's people taken captive to Babylon	**537 B.C.E. and on**—A faithful remnant returns to Jerusalem, rebuilds the temple, and resumes pure worship
GREATER FULFILLMENT	**First Century C.E.**—Jesus, Paul, and John warn the congregation, but apostasy still flourishes	**Starting in Second Century C.E.**—True Christians are taken captive within Babylon the Great	**1919 C.E. and on**—Under Jesus' kingship, the faithful anointed saw the end of their spiritual exile and the restoration of pure worship

blessed condition, or environment, where they would never again suffer spiritual famine. **(Read Ezekiel 34:13, 14.)** As we will see further in Chapter 19 of this publication, Jehovah has blessed that land with an unprecedented flow of spiritual nourishment.—Ezek. 11:17.

29. How did the preaching work receive a boost in 1919?

29 PROMISE 3. *The resuming of gift offerings at Jehovah's altar.* Back in the first century C.E., Christians were taught that they were to offer to God, not literal animal sacrifices, but far more valuable gifts—the words that they spoke in praising Jehovah and preaching to others about him. (Heb. 13:15) During the centuries of exile, there was no organized arrangement to make such offerings. At the close of the exile, however, God's people were already making such sacrifices of praise. They were busy in the preaching work and happily praising God at their meetings. From 1919 on, "the faithful and discreet slave" put greater emphasis on the preaching work and organized it more thoroughly. (Matt. 24:45-47) Jehovah's altar was thus overflowing with the sacrifices of an ever-growing army of praisers of his holy name!

30 **PROMISE 4.** *The sifting out of bad shepherds.* Christ freed God's people from the unscrupulous, self-serving false shepherds of Christendom. In Christ's flock, shepherds who acted like those false shepherds were removed from their position. (Ezek. 20:38) Jesus, as the Fine Shepherd, made sure that his sheep were cared for. In 1919 he appointed his faithful and discreet slave. That small group of loyal anointed Christians took the lead in providing spiritual food, so God's people were well-cared-for. In time, elders were trained to assist in caring for "the flock of God." (1 Pet. 5:1, 2) The inspired description recorded at Ezekiel 34:15, 16 has often been used to remind Christian shepherds of the standard set by Jehovah God and Jesus Christ.

31 **PROMISE 5.** *Unity among worshippers of Jehovah.* Over the centuries, Christendom has split into tens of thousands of denominations, including countless factions and sects that are hopelessly at odds. In contrast, Jehovah has done something truly miraculous with his restored people. His promise through Ezekiel, "I will give them a unified heart," has seen a glorious fulfillment. (Ezek. 11:19) Around the world, Christ has millions of followers from countless ethnic, religious, economic, and social backgrounds. Yet, all are taught the same truths and carry out the same work in marvelous harmony. On the final night of his life on earth, Jesus earnestly prayed that his followers would be united. **(Read John 17:11, 20-23.)** In our day, Jehovah has fulfilled that request in the greatest way.

32 Are you not delighted to live during this thrilling time of restoration? We see the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecies in every facet of our worship today. We can be confident that Jehovah now looks on his people with favor, just as he foretold through Ezekiel: "I will take pleasure in you." (Ezek. 20:41) Do you realize what a privilege you have to be part of the unified, well-fed people who are offering praise to Jehovah around the world—a people freed after centuries of spiritual exile? Still, some of Ezekiel's restoration prophecies will see a greater fulfillment yet.

30. What did Jesus do to meet his people's need for good shepherds?

31. How did Jehovah fulfill the prophecy of Ezekiel 11:19?

32. How do you feel about the fulfillment of the restoration prophecies? (See also the box "Prophecies of Captivity and Restoration.")

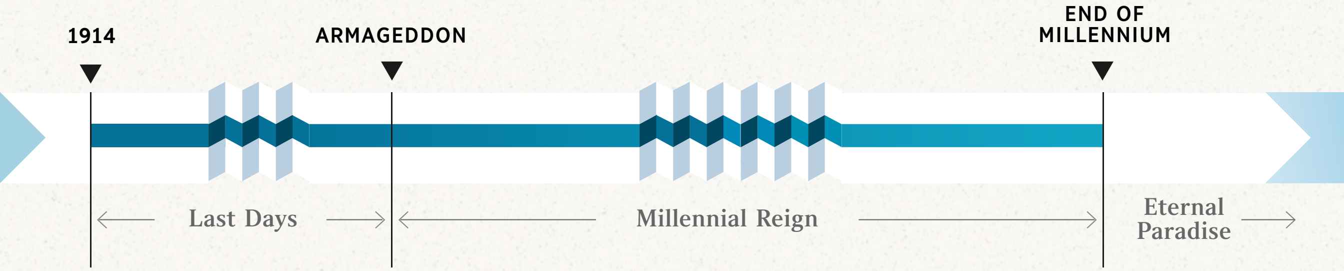
9E

“THE TIMES OF RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS”

ACTS 3:21

SEE PARAGRAPHS 23, 33-39

When the apostle Peter mentioned “the times of restoration of all things,” he was speaking prophetically about a marvelous span of time that would begin with Christ’s enthronement as King and continue to the end of the Millennium.



Jesus Christ is enthroned as King in heaven. Spiritual restoration of God’s people begins in 1919

Christ’s Millennial Reign begins, and “the times of restoration of all things” expands to include physical blessings for faithful humans on earth

Jesus completes all restoration work and hands the Kingdom over to his Father

JESUS’ RULERSHIP WILL RESTORE . . .

- glory to the name of God
- health to the sick
- youth to the elderly
- life to the dead
- perfection to faithful mankind
- Paradise on earth

“Like the Garden of Eden”

33 As we have seen, “the times of restoration of all things” began with the restoration of the Davidic line of kings when Jesus was enthroned in 1914. (Ezek. 37:24) Next, Jehovah empowered Christ to restore pure worship among His people after many centuries of spiritual exile. However, does Christ’s restoration work stop there? Far from it! That work will continue in a spectacular way in the future—and Ezekiel’s prophecies give us soul-stirring details.

34 Consider, for example, these inspired words: “People will say: ‘The desolate land has become like the garden of Eden.’ ” (Ezek. 36:35) What did that promise mean to Ezekiel and his fellow exiles? They surely did not expect a full, literal fulfillment—as if the restored land might actually be mistaken for the original garden, or Paradise, the one planted by Jehovah himself! (Gen. 2:8) Rather, they no doubt understood that Jehovah was reassuring them that their restored land would be beautiful and fruitful.

35 What does the same promise mean to us today? We do not expect a literal fulfillment now, in the midst of this wicked world ruled by Satan the Devil. Rather, we grasp that those words have a spiritual fulfillment today. As Jehovah’s servants, we inhabit a restored spiritual land, a condition, or environment, wherein we serve productively and make his sacred service the center of our lives. This spiritual land is gradually, steadily becoming ever more paradisaic. What, though, about the future?

36 After the great war of Armageddon, Jesus will expand his restoration work to cover even the physical earth. During his Thousand Year Reign, he will direct mankind to turn this planet into a global garden of Eden, a paradise, just as Jehovah always intended it to be! (Luke 23:43) Then all humans will be in harmony with one another and with their earthly home. There will be no danger, no threat, anywhere. Imagine a time when even this promise will be fulfilled: “I will make a covenant of peace with them, and I will rid the land of vicious wild beasts, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the forests.”—Ezek. 34:25.

37 Can you picture that? Without any fear, you will be able to visit any part of this vast earth. No animal will harm you. No danger will threaten your peace. You will be able to walk alone into the deepest forest, enjoying its majestic beauty,

33-35. (a) What did the prophecy of Ezekiel 36:35 mean to the Jewish exiles? (b) What does that prophecy mean to Jehovah’s people today? (See also the box “The Times of Restoration of All Things.”)

36, 37. What promises will be fulfilled in the future Paradise?

even sleeping there in perfect safety, sure to wake up rested and unharmed!

38 We will see this promise fulfilled as well: "They will dwell on [the land] in security and build houses and plant vineyards, and they will dwell in security when I execute judgment on all those around them who treat them with scorn; and they will have to know that I am Jehovah their God." (Ezek. 28:26) After all of Jehovah's enemies are gone, we will enjoy peace and security earth wide. As we care for the earth, we will also be able to take care of ourselves and our loved ones, building comfortable houses to live in and planting vineyards to cultivate.

39 Do these promises sound to you like mere dreams? Remember, then, what you have already seen during this time of "restoration of all things." Despite Satan's fiercest opposition, Jesus has been empowered to restore pure worship during this world's darkest era. What powerful evidence that all of God's promises through Ezekiel will come true!

38. How do you feel about seeing the promise recorded at Ezekiel 28:26 fulfilled?

39. Why can you be sure that the prophecies Ezekiel recorded about Paradise will come true?

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

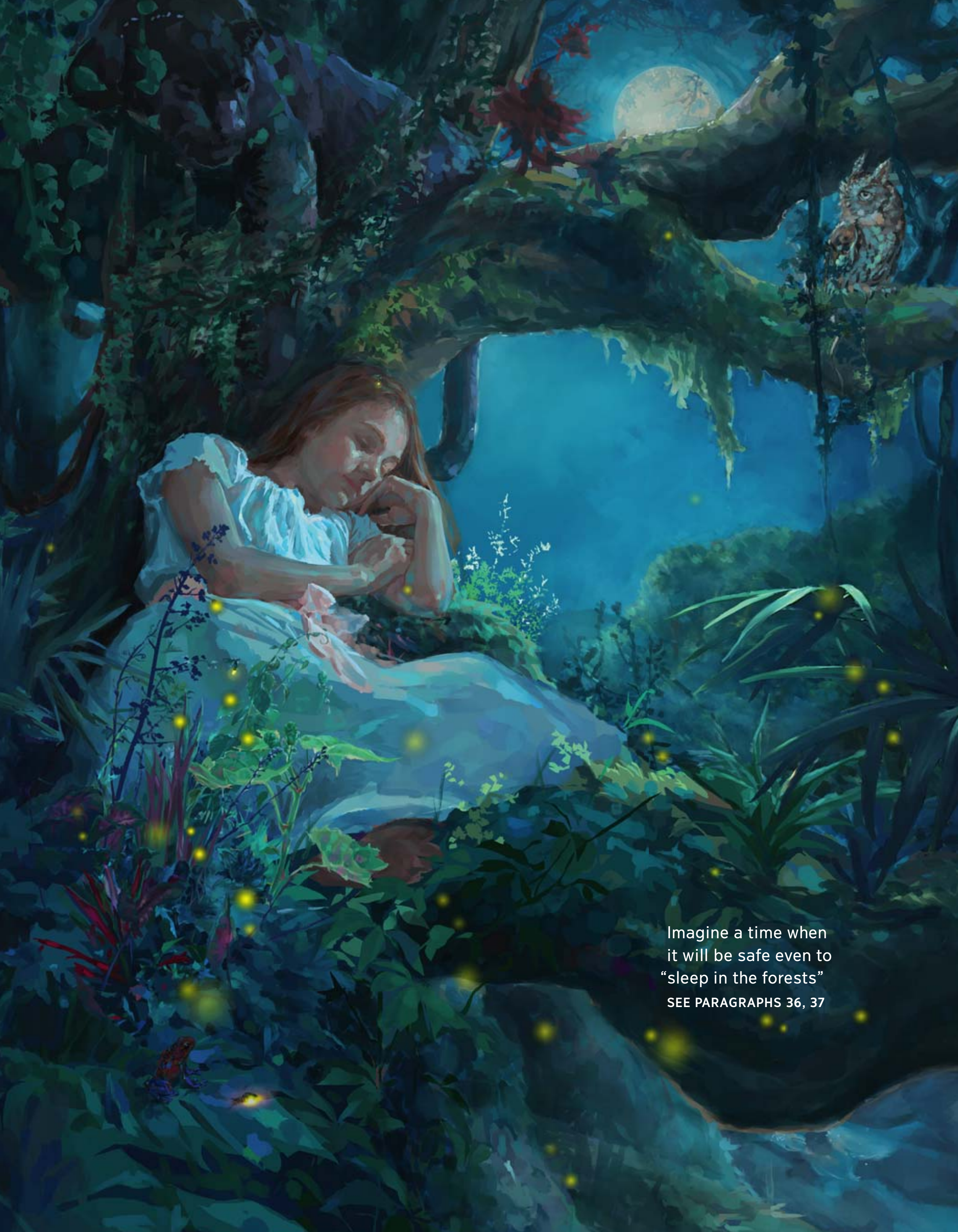
1 What was Babylonian captivity like for the Jews, and why did Jehovah eventually liberate his people?

2 How was the Christian congregation corrupted, and what happened that was similar to the Babylonian captivity of the Jews?

3 What promises of restoration did Jehovah make through Ezekiel, and how were they fulfilled on true Christians during the last days?

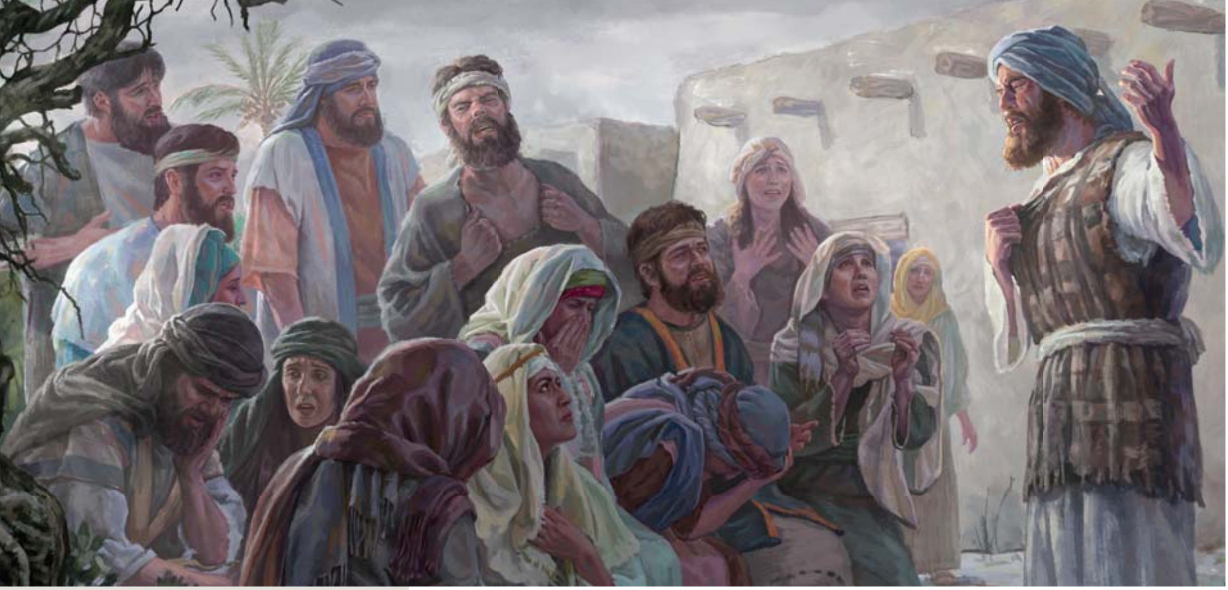
4 What are some restoration prophecies that you long to see fulfilled in Paradise?

5 How can we show that we appreciate the way that Jehovah has restored pure worship in our day?



Imagine a time when it will be safe even to "sleep in the forests"

SEE PARAGRAPHS 36, 37



10

“YOU WILL COME TO LIFE”

EZEKIEL 37:5

FOCUS: *The vision of the reviving of the “dry bones” and its larger fulfillment*

1-3. What causes a change of mood among the Jews in Babylon? (See opening picture.)

HOW the mood among the Jews in Babylon has changed! For some five years, Ezekiel hammered at their armor of false hopes, but his efforts barely made a dent. No matter what signs he acted out, what illustrations he spoke, what messages he proclaimed, the exiles refused to believe that Jehovah would allow Jerusalem to be destroyed. Even when they learned that the city had come under siege by the Babylonian army, they were still confident that its inhabitants would be safe.

2 But now, two years after the start of the siege, a refugee from Jerusalem has just arrived in Babylon, bringing the report: “The city has been struck down!” That news devastates the exiles. They struggle to grasp its full significance: the beloved city, the holy temple, the cherished land—all gone! Their long-held hope gives way to despair.—Ezek. 21:7; 33:21.

3 However, at this moment of desperation, Ezekiel receives a powerful vision of hope. What message does the vision con-

tain for the shattered exiles? How does this vision relate to God's people today, and how can we personally benefit from it? To find out, let us examine what Jehovah reveals to Ezekiel.

"Prophesy Over These Bones" and "Prophesy to the Wind"

4 **Read Ezekiel 37:1-10.** In a vision, Ezekiel is set down in a valley plain that is covered with bones. As if to make sure that Ezekiel felt the full impact of the vision, Jehovah ordered the prophet to "pass all around" those widely scattered bones. As Ezekiel walked on the valley plain, two things about the bones especially stood out to him: their number and their condition. "There were *very many,"* he observed, and "they were *very dry."*

5 Then Jehovah gave Ezekiel two commands that would set in motion a progressive restoration. The first command was: "Prophesy over these bones," telling them to "come to life." (Ezek. 37:4-6) As soon as Ezekiel prophesied, "there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones began to come together," after which "sinews and flesh" came on the bones, "and skin covered over them." (Ezek. 37:7, 8) The second command was: "Prophesy to the wind," telling it to "blow upon" the bodies. When Ezekiel prophesied, "breath came into them, and they began to live and to stand on their feet, an extremely large army."—Ezek. 37:9, 10.

"Our Bones Are Dry, and Our Hope Has Perished"

6 Jehovah next revealed to Ezekiel how the vision was to be understood, saying: "These bones are the whole house of Israel." Indeed, after the exiles had learned of Jerusalem's destruction, they felt that they were as good as dead. Therefore, they lamented: "Our bones are dry, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off." (Ezek. 37:11; Jer. 34:20) Then in response to their lament, Jehovah revealed that this gloomy vision of bones actually contained a bright message of hope for Israel.

7 **Read Ezekiel 37:12-14.** Through this vision, Jehovah assured the exiles that he would bring them to life, lead them back to their land, and let them settle there. Moreover, Jehovah addressed them again as "my people." How uplifting those words must have been for the despondent exiles! Why could they be certain that this promise of restoration would come true? Because Jehovah himself stood behind it. He declared: *"I myself,* Jehovah, have spoken and *I* have done it."

4. What stood out to Ezekiel in the vision he received?

5. What two commands did Jehovah give to Ezekiel, and what happened after Ezekiel carried them out?

6. What words of Jehovah helped Ezekiel to understand the vision?

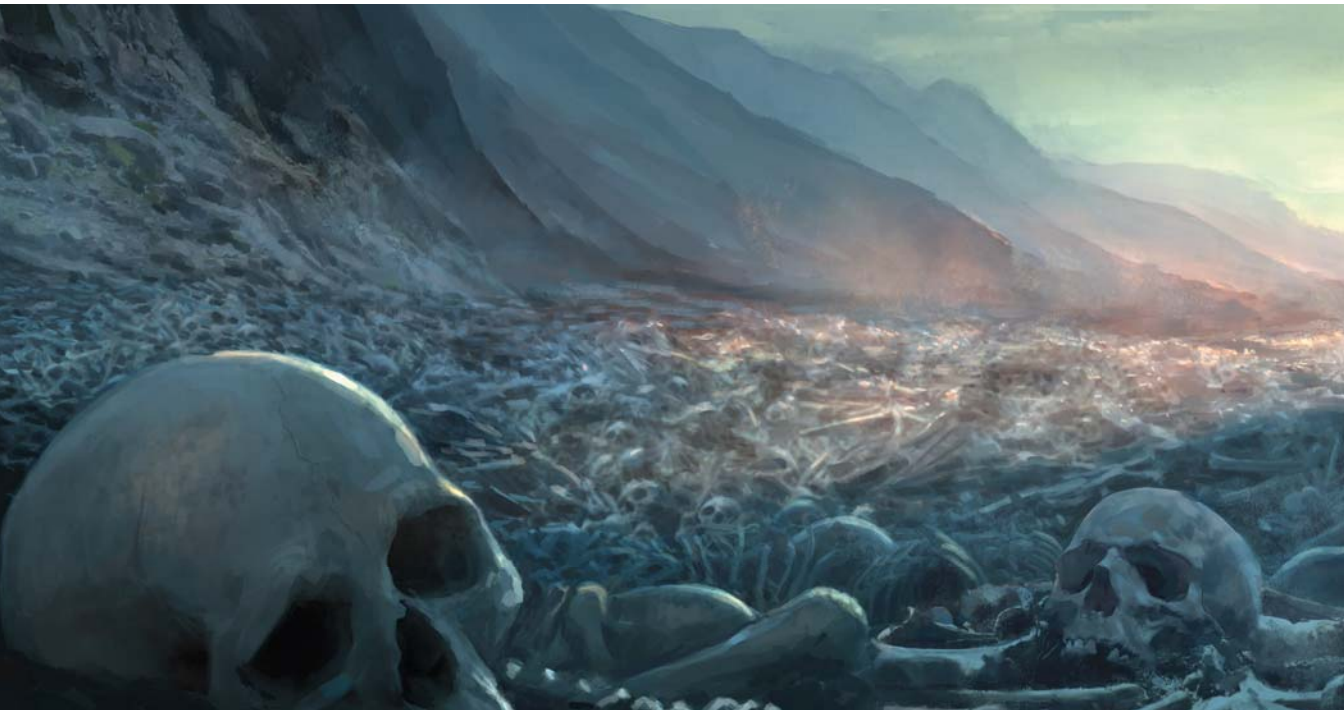
7. What did Jehovah reveal to Ezekiel, as recorded at Ezekiel 37:12-14, and what assurance did this give His exiled people?

8. (a) How was "the whole house of Israel" in a deathlike condition? (b) How does Ezekiel 37:9 indicate the cause of Israel's symbolic death? (See footnote.)

9. What similarities are there between the experiences of ancient natural Israel and those of "the Israel of God"?

8 How had the ancient nation of Israel experienced the fulfillment of the gloomy part of this prophetic vision? The symbolic demise of Israel had already begun in 740 B.C.E. with the fall and exile of the ten-tribe kingdom. Some 130 years later, when the people of Judah were also deported, "the whole house of Israel" was in captivity. (Ezek. 37:11) Symbolically speaking, the whole group of exiles were then as dead as the bones seen in Ezekiel's vision.[1] Also recall that Ezekiel saw not just bones but *"very dry"* bones, which indicated that their deathlike condition continued for a long time. And, indeed, for Israel and Judah combined, it lasted over 200 years, from 740 to 537 B.C.E.—Jer. 50:33.

9 Restoration prophecies concerning Israel, such as the ones spoken by Ezekiel, have a larger fulfillment. (Acts 3:21) Just as the ancient nation of natural Israel was "killed" and remained symbolically dead for a considerable time, so "the Israel of God," the anointed Christian congregation, was killed symbolically and experienced deathlike captivity for a long time. (Gal. 6:16) In fact, the captivity of the anointed congregation as a whole continued for so long that their spiritual condition could well be compared to that of bones that "were very dry." (Ezek. 37:2) As explained in the preceding chapter, the captivity of the anointed Christian con-



FOOTNOTE

[1] The bones that Ezekiel saw in vision belonged, not to people who had died from natural causes, but to "people who were *killed.*" (Ezek. 37:9) "The *whole* house of Israel" was, indeed, killed symbolically when the inhabitants of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel and those of the two-tribe kingdom of Judah were successively conquered, taken captive, and deported by the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

gregation began in the second century C.E. and lasted for many centuries, just as Jesus had indicated in his Kingdom illustration of the wheat and the weeds.—Matt. 13:24-30.

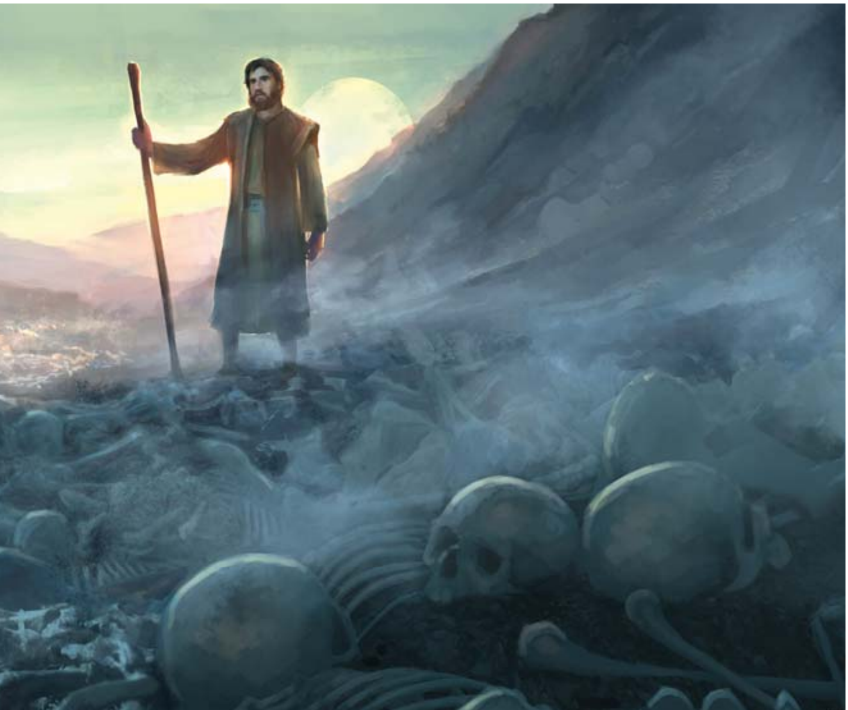
“Bones Began to Come Together”

10 In ancient times, Jehovah foretold that his people would experience a progressive restoration to life. (Ezek. 37:7, 8) So, what were some of the factors that gradually restored to God-fearing exiles the faith that their hope of returning to Israel would be fulfilled? One source of hope must have been the prophetic statements made by earlier prophets. For example, Isaiah had foretold that a remnant, “a holy seed,” would return to the land. (Isa. 6:13; Job 14:7-9) Also, the many prophecies of restoration that Ezekiel had written down no doubt kept that hope alive. Further, the presence in Babylon of such faithful men as the prophet Daniel—as well as the amazing fall of the city of Babylon in 539 B.C.E.—must have bolstered the exiles’ hope of return.

11 How did a similar gradual restoration occur among “the Israel of God,” the anointed Christian congregation? Many centuries into the long period of deathlike captivity, “a noise, a rattling sound,” was heard as God-fearing individuals rose up in behalf of true worship. For instance, in the 16th century, William Tyndale prepared a Bible translation in English.

10. (a) What development regarding God’s people was foretold at Ezekiel 37:7, 8? (b) What factors must have gradually restored the faith of God-fearing exiles?

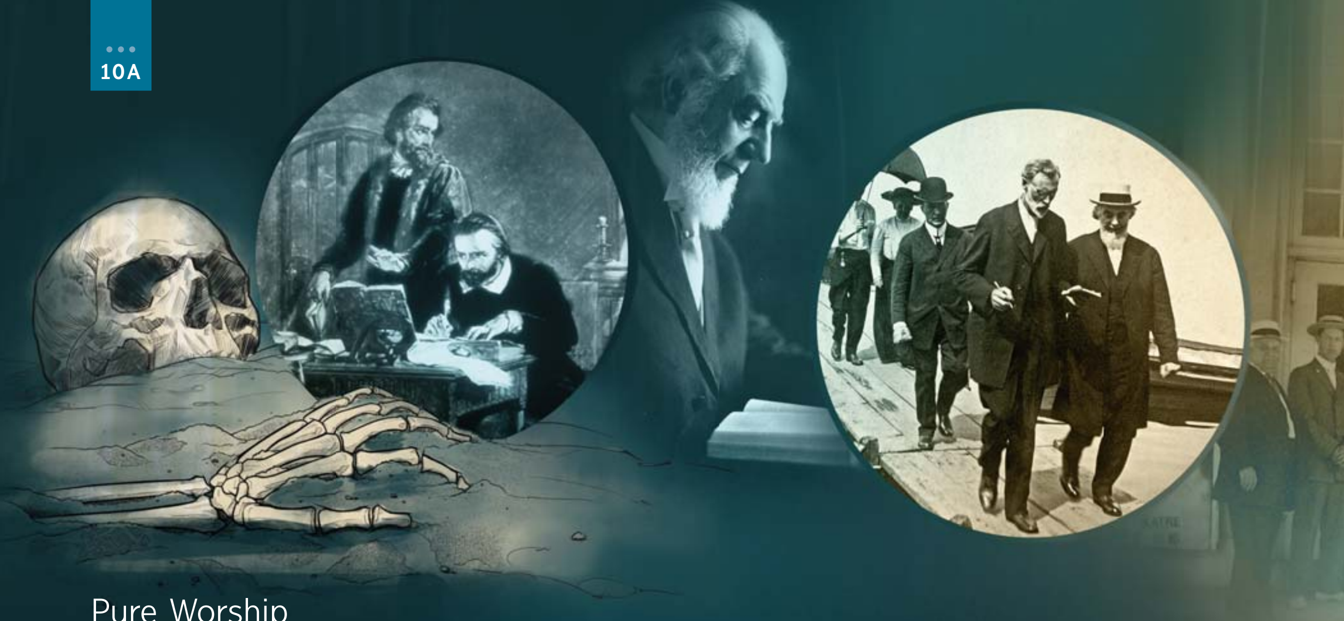
11, 12. (a) How did a gradual restoration occur among “the Israel of God”? (See also the box “Pure Worship—Gradually Restored.”) (b) What question is raised by the statement found at Ezekiel 37:10?



The “very dry” bones Ezekiel saw in vision depicted a long period of deathlike captivity for Jehovah’s anointed

SEE PARAGRAPHS 8, 9

10A



Pure Worship
GRADUALLY RESTORED

SEE PARAGRAPHS 11-14

"A rattling sound"
William Tyndale and others prepared Bible translations in English and other languages

"Sinews and flesh"
Charles T. Russell and his associates restored Bible truths

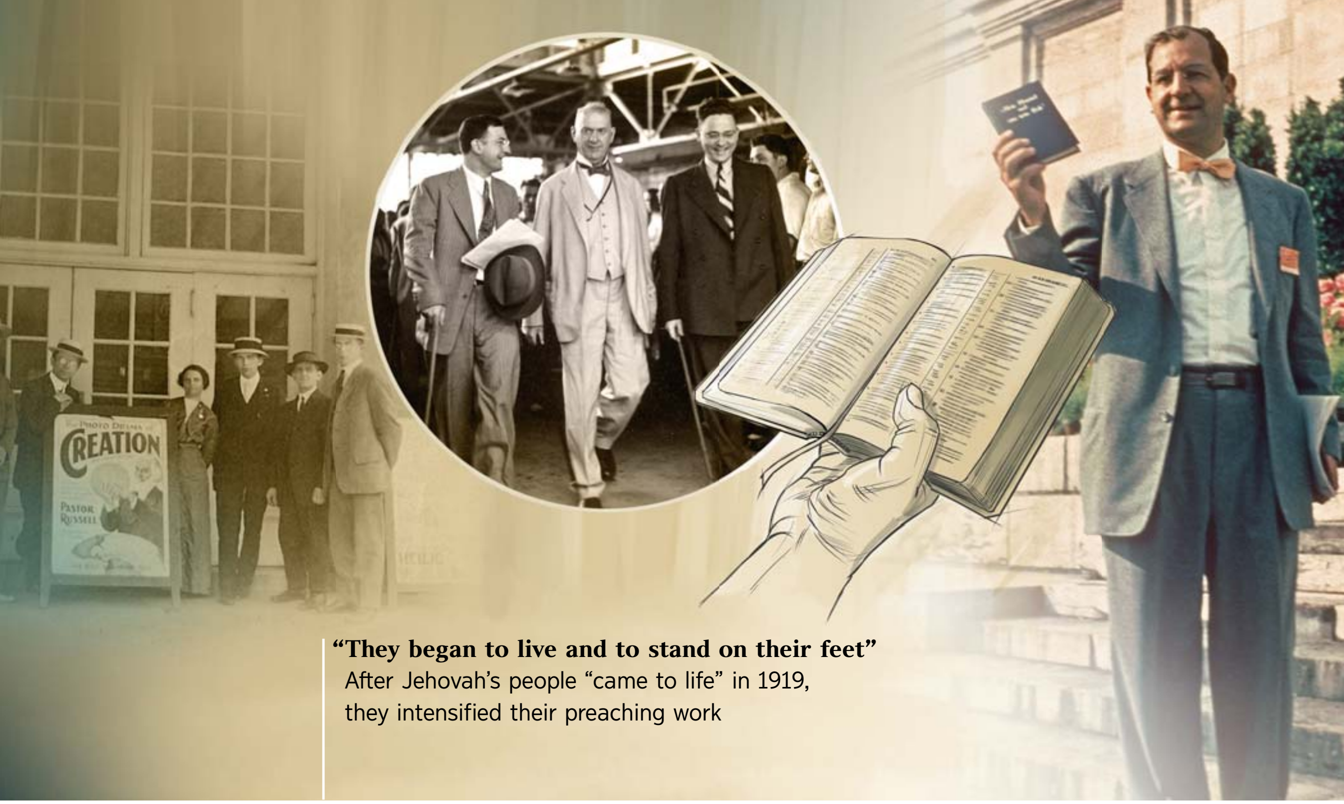
The Roman Catholic clergy were angered that the Bible could now be read by the common man. Tyndale was killed. Even so, other courageous individuals continued to produce Bible translations in additional languages, and spiritual light gradually spread throughout the dark world.

12 Later, when Charles T. Russell and his associates began to work zealously to restore Bible truths, it was as if "sinews and flesh" came on the bones. *Zion's Watch Tower* and other publications helped honesthearted ones to discover spiritual truths, which moved them to join themselves to God's anointed servants. In the early 1900's, God's anointed people were further energized by such tools as the "Photo-Drama of Creation" and the book *The Finished Mystery*. Shortly thereafter, God's time came to make his people "stand on their feet." (Ezek. 37:10) When and how did that occur? Events that took place in ancient Babylon help us to answer that question.

"They Began to Live and to Stand on Their Feet"

13. (a) Beginning in 537 B.C.E., how did the words found at Ezekiel 37:10, 14 see fulfillment? (b) What scriptures indicate that some members of the ten-tribe kingdom returned to Israel?

13 Beginning in 537 B.C.E., the Jews in Babylon saw the fulfillment of the vision. How? Jehovah brought them to life and made them "stand on their feet" by delivering them from



“They began to live and to stand on their feet”
After Jehovah’s people “came to life” in 1919, they intensified their preaching work

captivity and letting them return to Israel. A group of 42,360 Israelites and some 7,000 non-Israelites left Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple and to settle on the soil of Israel. (Ezra 1:1-4; 2:64, 65; Ezek. 37:14) Then, some 70 years later, about 1,750 exiles joined Ezra when he returned to Jerusalem. (Ezra 8:1-20) So, in total, over 44,000 Jews returned —indeed, a “large army.” (Ezek. 37:10) In addition, God’s Word indicates that members of the ten-tribe kingdom, whose forefathers had been deported by the Assyrians during the eighth century B.C.E., also returned to Israel to assist in rebuilding the temple.—1 Chron. 9:3; Ezra 6:17; Jer. 33:7; Ezek. 36:10.

14 How did this part of Ezekiel’s prophecy see a larger fulfillment? As Jehovah revealed to Ezekiel in a related prophecy, the principal fulfillment of this restoration prophecy would occur some time after the Greater David, Jesus Christ, began to rule as King.[2] (Ezek. 37:24) And indeed, in 1919, Jehovah put his spirit in his people. As a result, they came “to life” and were released from their captivity to Babylon the Great. (Isa. 66:8) After that, Jehovah allowed them to

14. (a) How do the words at Ezekiel 37:24 help us to determine the time of the prophecy’s principal fulfillment? (b) What took place in 1919? (See also the box “ ‘Dry Bones’ and ‘Two Witnesses’ —How Do They Relate?”)

FOOTNOTE

[2] This Messianic prophecy was discussed in Chapter 8 of this publication.

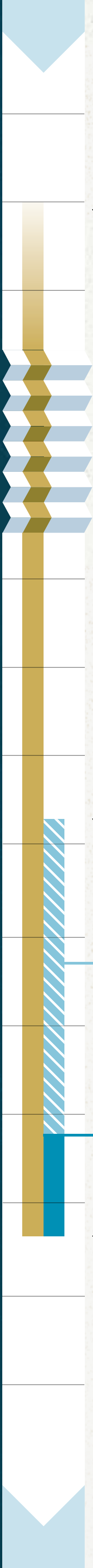
10B

“DRY BONES” AND “TWO WITNESSES”
HOW DO THEY RELATE?

SEE PARAGRAPHS 9, 14

THE year 1919 saw the fulfillment of two related prophecies: one regarding “dry bones,” the other about “two witnesses.” The vision of “dry bones” foretells a very long period (which turned out to be many centuries) that ends with the coming to life of a large group of God’s people. (Ezek. 37:2-4; Rev. 11:1-3, 7-13) The prophecy about the “two witnesses” describes a short period (fulfilled from late 1914 to early 1919) that ends with the coming to life of a small group of God’s servants. Both prophecies depicted a symbolic resurrection, and both prophecies saw a modern-day fulfillment in 1919 when Jehovah caused his anointed servants “to stand on their feet,” leave their captivity to Babylon the Great, and be gathered in the restored congregation.—Ezek. 37:10.

Note, though, that the fulfillment of these two prophecies differs in an important way. The prophecy of the “dry bones” foretells the coming to life of *all* members of the anointed remnant. However, the prophecy of the “two witnesses” foretells the coming to life of *some* members of God’s anointed remnant—those who were taking the lead in the organization and who were appointed as “the faithful and discreet slave.”—Matt. 24:45; Rev. 11:6.[a]



AFTER 100 C.E.

“The Valley Plain . . . Full of Bones”
—Ezek. 37:1

From the second century C.E. onward when the anointed Christian congregation was killed symbolically, “the valley plain” was filled with “bones”

LATE 1914

“Two Witnesses”
—Rev. 11:3

1914: The “two witnesses” preached “in sackcloth” for three and a half years. At the end of that period, they were symbolically killed

preaching “in sackcloth”

symbolic death

1919: The “dry bones” came to life when Jehovah caused all anointed ones to leave Babylon the Great and be gathered in the restored congregation

EARLY 1919

1919: The “two witnesses” came to life when a small group of anointed brothers who were taking the lead in the organization were appointed to serve as “the faithful and discreet slave”

FOOTNOTE

[a] See *The Watchtower,* March 2016, “Questions From Readers.”

settle on their "land," that is, in the spiritual paradise. How, though, have Jehovah's modern-day people become a "large army"?

15 Not long after Christ appointed the faithful slave in 1919, God's servants began to experience what Zechariah, a prophet serving among the returned exiles, had foretold when he said: "Many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek Jehovah." The prophet depicted those seekers of Jehovah as "ten men out of all the languages of the nations." The men would take firm hold of "a Jew," spiritual Israel, while saying: "We want to go with you, for we have heard that God is with you people."—Zech. 8:20-23.

16 Today, those of spiritual Israel (the anointed remnant) and, by extension, the "ten men" (the other sheep) together do indeed form "an extremely large army," numbering into the millions. (Ezek. 37:10) As soldiers of Christ in this evergrowing army, we closely follow our King, Jesus, onward to the blessings that lie ahead of us.—Ps. 37:29; Ezek. 37:24; Phil. 2:25; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17.

17 This restoration of pure worship would bring on God's people an important responsibility. What is it? To find the answer to that question, we need to go back and examine an assignment that Ezekiel received from Jehovah even before Jerusalem was destroyed. We will do that in the following chapter of this publication.

15, 16. (a) How have Jehovah's modern-day people become a "large army"? (b) How does this prophecy of Ezekiel help us to cope with trialsome circumstances in life? (See the box "Help to Get Back on Our Feet.")

17. What will we consider in the following chapter?

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 Why did the exiles in Babylon say that their bones were dry? (Ezek. 37:11)

2 In what way was the modern-day "Israel of God" in a deathlike situation? (Matt. 13:24-30)

3 How did "the Israel of God" experience a gradual restoration, and when did they "come to life"? (Ezek. 37:7-9)

4 How do you feel about being part of the "extremely large army" that Ezekiel's prophecy foretold? (Ezek. 37:10)

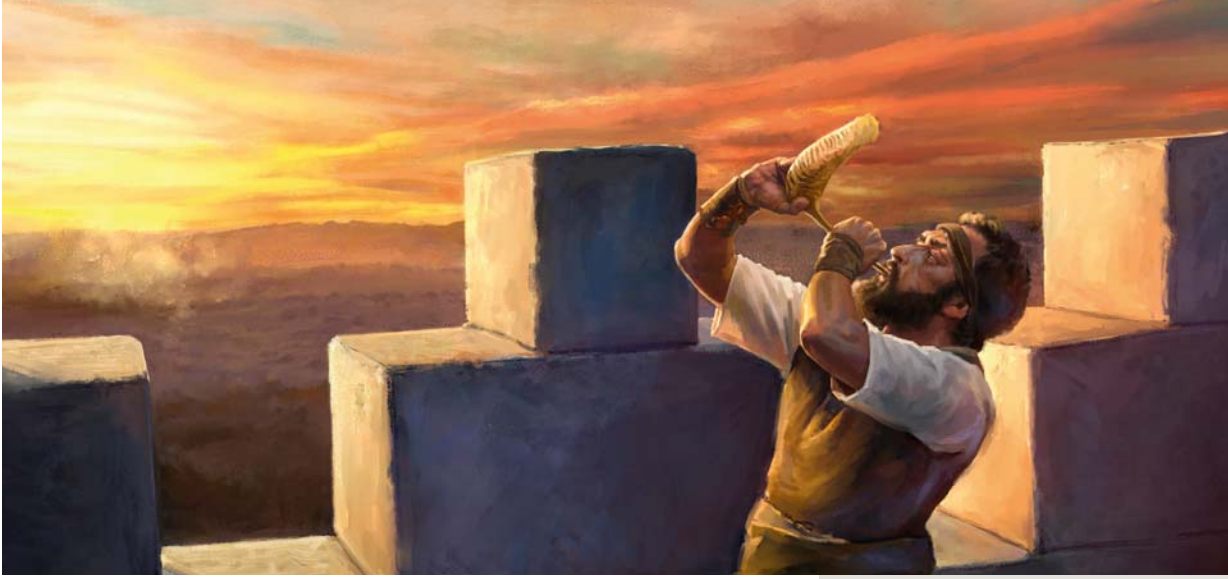
10C

HELP TO GET BACK ON OUR FEET

WE CAN be strengthened by reflecting on the lesson from this impressive vision recorded at Ezekiel 37:1-14, a lesson that we can apply to our personal circumstances. What is it?

At times, we may feel so overwhelmed by pressures and trials in our life that we are worn out, and we struggle to go on. However, at such moments, we may be fortified if we reflect on the vivid description in Ezekiel's restoration vision. Why? We can learn from this prophecy that a God who has the power to breathe life into dead bones can surely give us the strength we need to overcome obstacles—even those that, humanly speaking, are insurmountable.—**Read Psalm 18:29;** Phil. 4:13.

We may be reminded that many centuries before Ezekiel's day, the prophet Moses stated that Jehovah has not only the power but also the desire to use his strength in behalf of his people. Moses wrote: "God is a refuge from ancient times, his everlasting arms are beneath you." (Deut. 33:27) Yes, we can be sure that if we turn to our God in times of distress, Jehovah will put his caring arms beneath us, gently lift us up, and help us to get back on our feet. —Ezek. 37:10.



11

“I HAVE APPOINTED YOU AS A WATCHMAN”

EZEKIEL 33:7

FOCUS: *Jehovah commissions a watchman and outlines his responsibility*

A WATCHMAN stands on the walls of Jerusalem, shielding his eyes as the sun sets. He scours the horizon. Suddenly, he raises his trumpet, fills his lungs, and sounds a warning—the Babylonian army is coming! But it is too late for the apathetic inhabitants of the city to act on this blast from the watchman’s horn. For decades, Jehovah’s appointed watchmen, or prophets, have been sounding a warning that this day would arrive; yet, the people have refused to listen. Now the Babylonian army surrounds the city. After a siege of many months, soldiers burst through the city walls, level the temple, and slaughter or capture the faithless, idolatrous inhabitants of Jerusalem.

2 Today, Jehovah’s executional forces are marching toward a confrontation with the faithless inhabitants of the earth. (Rev. 17:12-14) That clash will be the culmination of the greatest tribulation in human history. (Matt. 24:21) But it is not too late for many to respond to the warning sounded

1. Describe what Jehovah’s prophetic watchmen have been doing and the events that follow.

2, 3. (a) What situation are the inhabitants of the earth facing today? (b) What questions will we consider?

4. Why did Jehovah appoint watchmen? (See opening picture.)

5, 6. What is one way in which Jehovah's justice is evident?

7. On what basis does Jehovah judge people?

by those whom Jehovah has appointed to do the work of a watchman.

3 What motivated Jehovah to appoint watchmen? What sort of message does a watchman proclaim? Who have filled this role, and what part do we play? Let us consider the answers to these questions.

"You Must Warn Them From Me"

4 **Read Ezekiel 33:7.** Literal watchmen often stood on the walls of a city to help keep the inhabitants safe. They served as tangible evidence that the ruler of the city cared for his subjects. Although a blast from a watchman's horn might startle the sleeping residents, that same piercing call could save the lives of those who responded to it. Similarly, Jehovah appointed watchmen, not because he wanted to terrorize the Israelites with messages of doom, but because he cared for his people and wanted to save lives.

5 When appointing Ezekiel to be a watchman, Jehovah revealed aspects of his personality that we find reassuring. Consider just two of those attributes.

6 **Justice:** Jehovah's justice is evident in that *he deals impartially with us as individuals.* For example, although Ezekiel's message was heard and rejected by large crowds, Jehovah did not treat all the Israelites as a rebellious mob; rather, he wanted to see how individuals responded. He repeatedly speaks about talking to the "wicked *one*" and to "some*one* righteous." Therefore, Jehovah passes judgment based on how each individual reacts to the message.—Ezek. 33:8, 18-20.

7 Jehovah's justice can also be seen by *the way in which he judges people.* Individuals are held accountable, not for what they did in the past, but for how they respond to the current warning. Jehovah told Ezekiel: "When I say to the wicked one: 'You will surely die,' and he turns away from his sin and does what is just and righteous, . . . he will surely keep living." Then Jehovah adds a remarkable statement: "None of the sins he committed will be held against him." (Ezek. 33:14-16) On the other hand, those who followed a righteous path cannot expect past obedience to excuse current rebellion. Jehovah stated that if a man "trusts in his own righteousness and does what is wrong, none of his righteous acts will be remembered, but he will die for the wrong that he has done."—Ezek. 33:13.

8 Jehovah's sense of justice is further evident in that *he gives due warning* before he acts. Ezekiel began his work some six years before the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem. But Ezekiel was not the first to warn God's people that they would be held accountable. For more than a century prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, Jehovah sent the prophets Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Oded, and Jeremiah to act as watchmen. Jehovah had Jeremiah remind the Israelites: "I appointed watchmen who said, 'Pay attention to the sound of the horn!' " (Jer. 6:17) Neither Jehovah nor those watchmen could be held accountable for the lives lost when the Babylonians finally executed Jehovah's judgment.

9 **Love:** Jehovah displayed loyal love by sending his watchmen to warn not only the righteous but also the wicked—the very ones who broke his heart and tarnished his reputation. Just think—the Israelites were known as Jehovah's people, but they repeatedly turned their backs on him and ran after false gods! Jehovah conveyed the depth of his emotional pain at this betrayal by likening the nation to an adulterous wife. (Ezek. 16:32) Even so, Jehovah did not give up on them quickly. He sought reconciliation, not revenge. He wielded the sword of judgment as a last resort, not a first response. Why? He told Ezekiel: "I take no pleasure in the death of the

8. What do prophetic warnings teach us about Jehovah's justice?

9. How did Jehovah display loyal love?

Do we see people the way Jehovah sees them?
SEE PARAGRAPH 10

wicked, but rather that someone wicked changes his way and keeps living." (Ezek. 33:11) That was how Jehovah felt back then, and it is how Jehovah feels today.—Mal. 3:6.

10, 11. What lessons can we learn from Jehovah's dealings with his people?

10 What can we learn from the just and loving way that Jehovah dealt with the Israelites? One lesson is that we must view the people to whom we preach, not as part of a faceless crowd, but as unique individuals. What a mistake it would be to prejudge a person as unworthy of hearing the message we bear because of his past conduct or because of his ethnic, tribal, economic, or language background! Jehovah taught the apostle Peter a lesson that resonates today: "God is not partial, but in every nation the man who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."—Acts 10:34, 35.

11 Another key lesson is that we need to keep a close eye on ourselves; past righteous works do not excuse current wrongdoing. We do well to remember that we have the same sinful tendencies as do those to whom we preach. The counsel that the apostle Paul gave to the Corinthian congregation applies equally to us: "Let the one who thinks he is standing beware that he does not fall. No temptation has come upon you except what is common to men." (1 Cor. 10:12, 13) Never would we want to be one who "trusts in his own righteousness," thinking that we can do wrong with impunity because

11A

SOME EXEMPLARY WATCHMEN

These watchmen faced opposition, remained loyal, and announced both warnings and good news.

ANCIENT ISRAEL	FIRST CENTURY	MODERN TIMES
Isaiah 778–c. 732 B.C.E.	**John the Baptist** 29-32 C.E.	**C. T. Russell and His Associates** c. 1879-1919
Jeremiah 647-580 B.C.E.	**Jesus** 29-33 C.E.	**The Faithful Slave** 1919–Today
Ezekiel 613–c. 591 B.C.E.	**Paul** c. 34–c. 65 C.E.	

we also do good works. (Ezek. 33:13) No matter how long we have been serving Jehovah, it is vital that we maintain a humble, obedient attitude.

12 What, though, if we have committed serious sins in the past but now feel remorse? From Ezekiel's message, we learn that Jehovah will punish *unrepentant* wrongdoers. However, we also learn that Jehovah is primarily a God of love, not vengeance. (1 John 4:8) If we prove by our actions that we are repentant, we should never feel that our sins are beyond God's mercy. (Jas. 5:14, 15) Jehovah was willing to forgive the spiritually adulterous Israelites, and he is willing to forgive us.—Ps. 86:5.

"Speak to the Sons of Your People"

13 **Read Ezekiel 33:2, 3.** What sort of message were Jehovah's watchmen to declare? A vital part of their work was to proclaim warnings. But they also delivered good news. Consider some examples.

14 Isaiah, who served from about 778 to 732 B.C.E., warned that the Babylonians would capture Jerusalem and take its inhabitants into exile. (Isa. 39:5-7) But he was also inspired to write: "Listen! Your watchmen raise their voice. In unison they shout joyfully, for they will see it clearly when Jehovah gathers back Zion." (Isa. 52:8) Isaiah proclaimed the best of news—true worship would be restored!

15 Jeremiah, who served from 647 to 580 B.C.E., is often unjustly labeled a "calamity howler." Without a doubt, he did an outstanding job of warning the wicked Israelites of the calamities that Jehovah would bring on them.[1] But he also proclaimed good news, foretelling the return of God's people to their land and the restoration of pure worship there. —Jer. 29:10-14; 33:10, 11.

16 Ezekiel was appointed as a watchman in 613 B.C.E., and he remained at his post at least until 591 B.C.E. As Chapters 5 and 6 of this publication discussed, Ezekiel zealously warned the people of Israel of the destruction that would descend on them, clearing himself of any bloodguilt for the lives that would be lost. In the process, he not only warned the exiles that Jehovah would punish apostates in Jerusalem but also helped to keep the captives in Babylon spiritually alive and fit for future work. At the end of the 70-year exile, Jehovah would plant a remnant in the restored land of Israel. (Ezek. 36:7-11) This remnant would mainly be made up of

12. If we committed serious sins in the past, what should we remember?

13, 14. (a) What sort of message were the watchmen to declare? (b) What message did Isaiah deliver?

15. What message did Jeremiah proclaim?

16. How did Ezekiel's message benefit the captives in Babylon?

FOOTNOTE

[1] The word "calamity" occurs some 60 times in the book of Jeremiah.

17. When has Jehovah appointed watchmen?

18. What work did John the Baptist do?

19, 20. How did Jesus and his disciples act as watchmen?

21. What example did Paul set?

the children and grandchildren of those who paid attention to Ezekiel. As the other chapters in Section 3 of this publication highlight, Ezekiel had much good news to share, confirming that pure worship would be restored in Jerusalem.

17 Were these prophets who spoke to God's people in the period surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. the only ones whom Jehovah has used to act as watchmen? The answer is no. At each major junction in the outworking of his purpose, Jehovah has appointed watchmen both to warn the wicked and to announce good news.

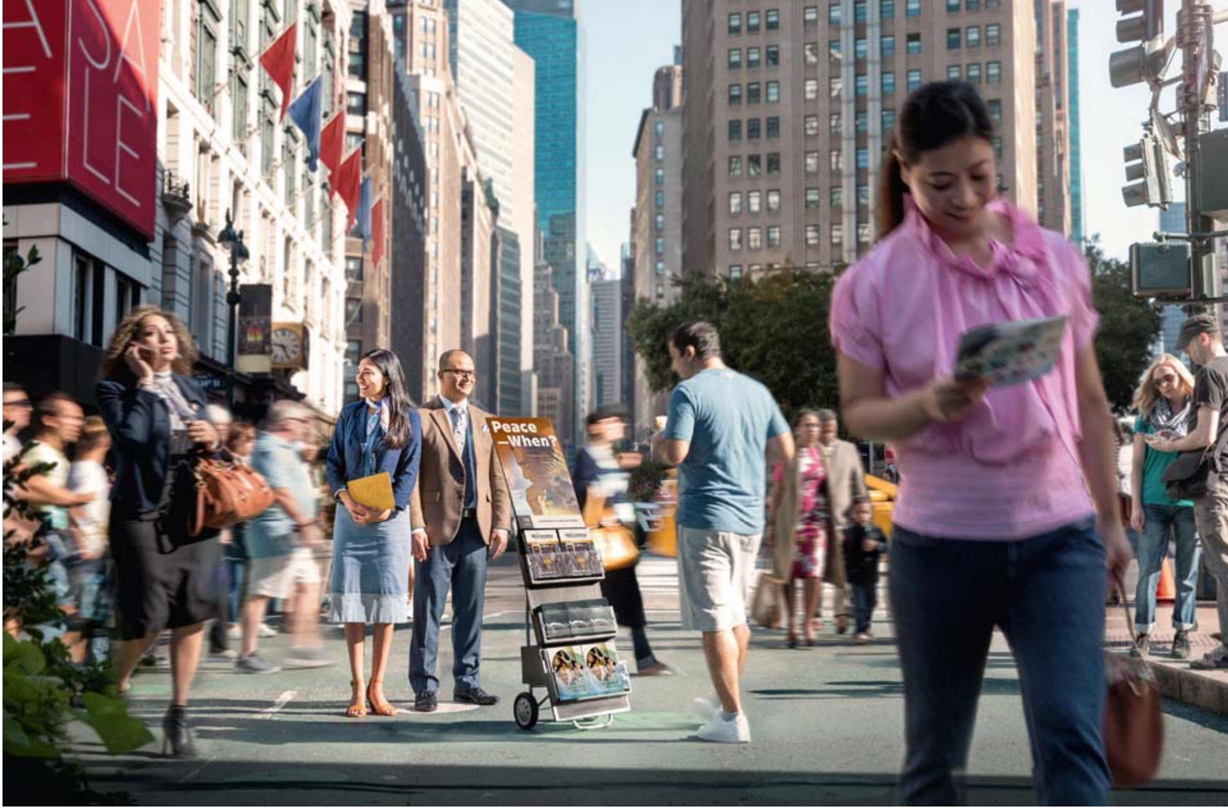
Watchmen in the First Century

18 In the first century C.E., John the Baptist did the work of a watchman. He warned those of the fleshly house of Israel that they would soon be rejected. (Matt. 3:1, 2, 9-11) But he did more. Jesus said that John was the foretold "messenger" who had prepared the way for the Messiah. (Mal. 3:1; Matt. 11:7-10) Part of that work included announcing good news—"the Lamb of God," Jesus, had arrived and would take away "the sin of the world."—John 1:29, 30.

19 Of all the watchmen, Jesus was the foremost. Like Ezekiel, he was sent by Jehovah to "the house of Israel." (Ezek. 3:17; Matt. 15:24) Jesus warned that the fleshly nation of Israel was soon to be rejected and that Jerusalem would be destroyed. (Matt. 23:37, 38; 24:1, 2; Luke 21:20-24) But his primary work was to announce good news.—Luke 4:17-21.

20 While on earth, Jesus specifically told his disciples: "Keep on the watch." (Matt. 24:42) They obeyed his command and acted as watchmen, warning that Jehovah had rejected the fleshly house of Israel and the earthly city of Jerusalem. (Rom. 9:6-8; Gal. 4:25, 26) Like the watchmen who went before them, they also had good news to declare. Their message included the remarkable announcement that Gentiles would now be included in the spirit-anointed Israel of God and would enjoy the privilege of helping Christ restore pure worship on earth.—Acts 15:14; Gal. 6:15, 16; Rev. 5:9, 10.

21 Among first-century watchmen, the apostle Paul set an outstanding example. He took his responsibility seriously. Like Ezekiel, he knew that he would be bloodguilty if he failed to fulfill his assignment. (Acts 20:26, 27) Following the pattern of other watchmen, Paul not only warned others but also proclaimed good news. (Acts 15:35; Rom. 1:1-4) In fact, under the guidance of holy spirit, he quoted the prophecy re-



We joyfully assist the modern-day watchman by sharing the good news

SEE PARAGRAPH 25

corded by Isaiah: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news," and he applied it to the work done by Christ's followers as they preach about God's Kingdom.—Isa. 52:7, 8; Rom. 10:13-15.

22 After the death of the apostles, the foretold apostasy overwhelmed the Christian congregation. (Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Thess. 2:3-8) During a long growing period, weedlike counterfeit Christians outnumbered loyal wheatlike followers of Christ, and the clear message about God's Kingdom was clouded over by false teachings. (Matt. 13:36-43) However, when the time approached for Jehovah to intervene in human affairs, he once again expressed his love and justice by appointing watchmen to sound a clear warning and to announce good news. Who proved to be such watchmen?

Jehovah Again Provides Watchmen to Warn the Wicked

23 During the years leading up to 1914, Charles Taze Russell and his associates acted as the "messenger" who would "clear up a way" before the Messianic Kingdom was established.[2] (Mal. 3:1) That group also did the work of a watchman, using

22. What happened after the death of the apostles?

23. What role did C. T. Russell and his associates play?

FOOTNOTE

[2] For a discussion of this prophecy and its fulfillment, see the book *God's Kingdom Rules!*, chapter 2, "The Kingdom Is Born in Heaven."

24. (a) How has the faithful slave acted as a watchman? (b) What have you learned from the example of past watchmen? (See the chart "Some Exemplary Watchmen.")

25, 26. (a) What work must all of Christ's followers do, and how is it done? (b) What will we consider in the next chapter?

the magazine *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* to help warn of God's judgment and to spread the good news about God's Kingdom.

24 After the Kingdom was established, Jesus appointed a small group of men to serve as the faithful slave. (Matt. 24:45-47) Since then, the faithful slave, now known as the Governing Body, has done the work of a watchman. It takes the lead not only in warning of "the day of vengeance" but also in proclaiming "the year of Jehovah's goodwill."—Isa. 61:2; see also 2 Corinthians 6:1, 2.

25 While the faithful slave takes the lead in the watchman work, Jesus assigned "all" of his followers to "keep on the watch." (Mark 13:33-37) We obey that command by remaining spiritually awake, loyally supporting the modern-day watchman. We prove that we are awake by fulfilling our responsibility to preach. (2 Tim. 4:2) What motivates us? In part, it is our desire to save lives. (1 Tim. 4:16) Soon multitudes will lose their lives because they ignored the warning call of the modern-day watchman. (Ezek. 3:19) But our primary motive is that we long to share the best of news—pure worship has been restored! Right now, during "the year of Jehovah's goodwill," the door is open for many more to join us in worshipping our just and loving God, Jehovah. Soon all on earth who survive the end of this wicked system will benefit from the merciful rule of his Son, Christ Jesus. How could we hold back from assisting the modern-day watchman in telling such good news!—Matt. 24:14.

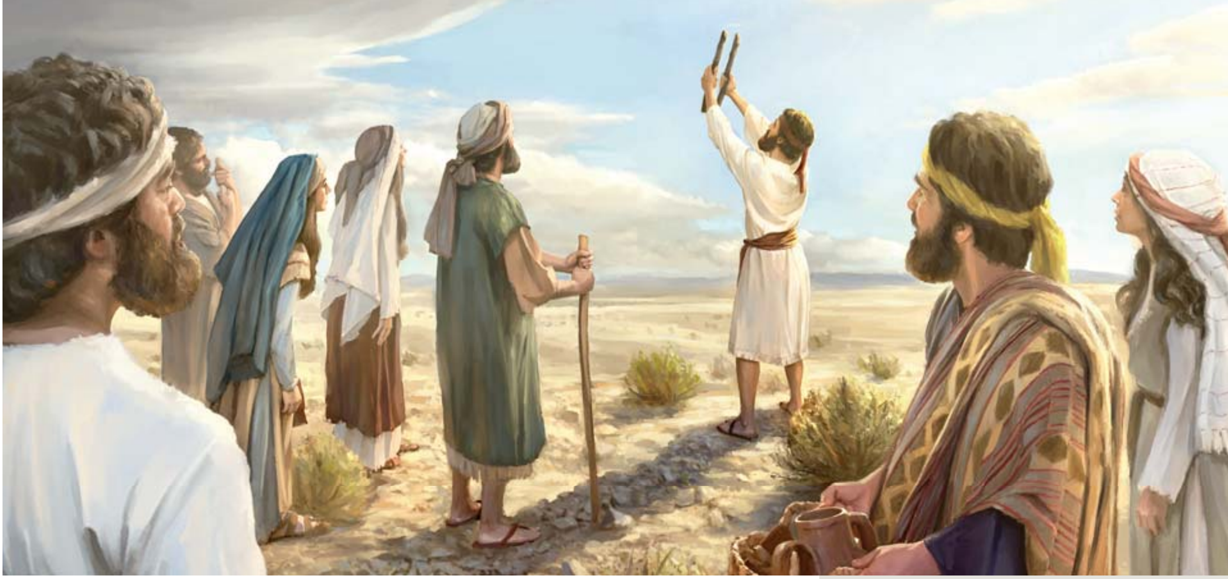
26 Even before this wicked system ends, Jehovah has united his people in a miraculous way. The next chapter will discuss a prophecy involving two sticks that are used to illustrate how this has happened.

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 What motivates Jehovah to appoint watchmen?

2 What twofold message do the watchmen deliver?

3 What is your role in supporting pure worship?



“I WILL MAKE THEM ONE NATION”

EZEKIEL 37:22

12

FOCUS: *Jehovah’s promise to collect his people together; the prophecy of the two sticks*

UNDER divine direction, Ezekiel has conveyed a number of prophecies to the exiles in Babylon by means of visible signs. The first prophecy acted out by Ezekiel contained a judgment message, the second one also, the third one too, and so on. (Ezek. 3:24-26; 4:1-7; 5:1; 12:3-6) In fact, all the prophecies that he has acted out by signs have conveyed messages of fierce judgment against the Jews.

2 Imagine, therefore, how alarmed the exiles must be when Ezekiel again takes his position in front of them, ready to act out another prophecy. ‘What devastating message will we receive this time?’ they must think. But they are in for a surprise. The prophecy that Ezekiel now begins to act out is very different. It contains, not a dark judgment, but a bright promise. (Ezek. 37:23) What message does Ezekiel convey to the exiles? What is its meaning? How does it affect God’s servants today? Let us find out.

1, 2. (a) Why might the exiles be alarmed? (b) Why are they in for a surprise? (c) What questions will we consider?

“They Will Become One in My Hand”

3 Jehovah instructed Ezekiel to take two sticks and to write on one “for Judah” and on the other “for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim.” **(Read Ezekiel 37:15, 16.)** What did these two sticks picture? The stick that was “for Judah” represented the two-tribe kingdom of Judah and Benjamin. Kings in the line of Judah had ruled the two tribes; also, the priesthood had been associated with them, for the priests served at the temple in Jerusalem. (2 Chron. 11:13, 14; 34:30) Hence, the kingdom of Judah held the Davidic line of kings as well as the Levitical priesthood. “The stick of Ephraim” represented the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. In what way was that stick associated with Ephraim? The first king of the ten-tribe kingdom was Jeroboam, from the tribe of Ephraim. In time, Ephraim became the dominant tribe in Israel. (Deut. 33:17; 1 Ki. 11:26) Note that the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel did *not* include Davidic kings or Levitical priests.

4 Ezekiel was further instructed to bring the two sticks together “so that they become just one stick.” As the exiles anxiously watched Ezekiel, they asked him: “Will you not tell us what these things mean?” He answered that the enactment illustrated what Jehovah himself would do. Regarding the two sticks, Jehovah stated: “*I* will make them one stick, and they will become one in *my* hand.”—Ezek. 37:17-19.

5 Next, Jehovah explained the meaning of the joining together of the two sticks. **(Read Ezekiel 37:21, 22.)** Exiles from the two-tribe kingdom of Judah and exiles from the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) would be brought to the land of Israel, where they would become “one nation.”—Jer. 30:1-3; 31:2-9; 33:7.

6 What amazing complementary prophecies of restoration are recorded in Ezekiel chapter 37! Jehovah will prove to be the God who restores not only life (verses 1-14) but also unity (verses 15-28). The heartening message conveyed by these two prophecies is: Death can be reversed, and so can division.

How Did Jehovah “Collect Them Together”?

7 Humanly speaking, the liberation and unification of the exiles seemed totally impossible.[1] However, “with God all things are possible.” (Matt. 19:26) Jehovah fulfilled his prophecy. The Babylonian captivity ended in 537 B.C.E., and thereafter, individuals of both kingdoms arrived in Jerusalem to help restore true worship. The inspired record confirms

3. (a) What was pictured by the stick “for Judah”? (b) Why did “the stick of Ephraim” represent the ten-tribe kingdom?

4. What does Ezekiel’s next action with the two sticks illustrate? (See opening picture.)

5. What is the meaning of what Ezekiel acted out? (See the box “The Joining of the Two Sticks.”)

6. What complementary prophecies are found in Ezekiel chapter 37?

7. How does the account found at 1 Chronicles 9:2, 3 confirm that “with God all things are possible”?

FOOTNOTE

[1] Some two centuries before Ezekiel received this prophecy, the inhabitants of the ten-tribe kingdom (“the stick of Ephraim”) were carried off as exiles by the Assyrians. —2 Ki. 17:23.

THE JOINING OF THE TWO STICKS

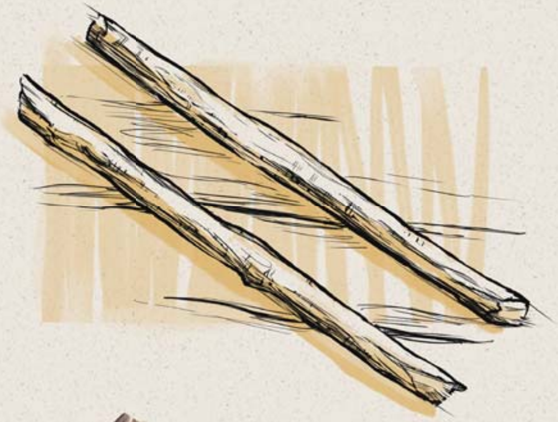
SEE PARAGRAPHS 3-6, 13, 14

Ezekiel is instructed by Jehovah to write on one stick "for Judah" and on another stick "for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim."

"for Judah"

ANCIENT TIMES
Two-tribe kingdom of Judah

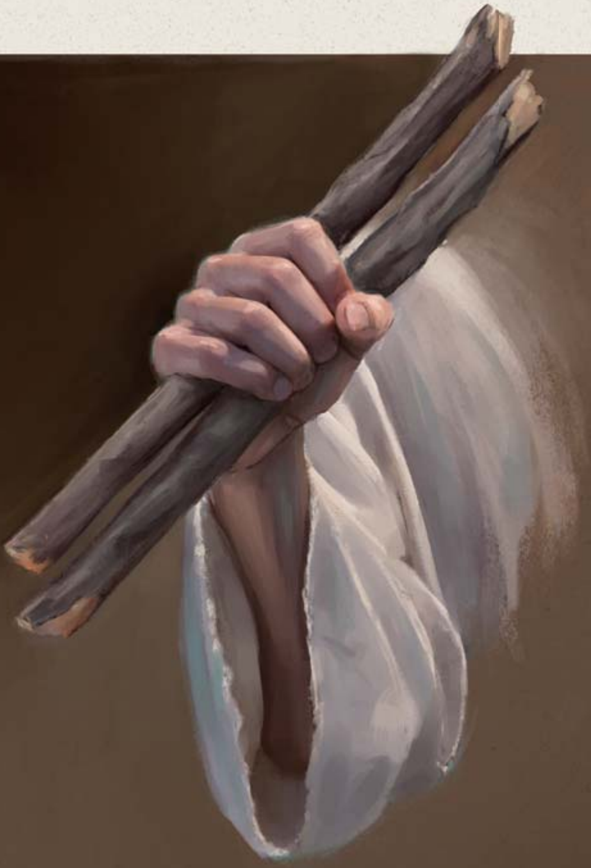
MODERN TIMES
The anointed



"for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim"

ANCIENT TIMES
Ten-tribe kingdom of Israel

MODERN TIMES
The other sheep



"they become just one stick in your hand"

ANCIENT TIMES
537 B.C.E. True worshippers return from the nations, rebuild Jerusalem, and worship as one nation.

MODERN TIMES
Since 1919, God's people are gradually reorganized and united to serve as "one flock."

Becoming united is the focus

The prophecy does not describe one stick that is first torn in two and then later brought together as one. Rather, it describes two sticks that become united as one. Hence, the prophecy did not focus on how the nation of Israel became divided into two kingdoms. Rather, it focused on how the two kingdoms would become one.

8. (a) What was prophesied by Isaiah? (b) What two significant aspects are found at Ezekiel 37:21?

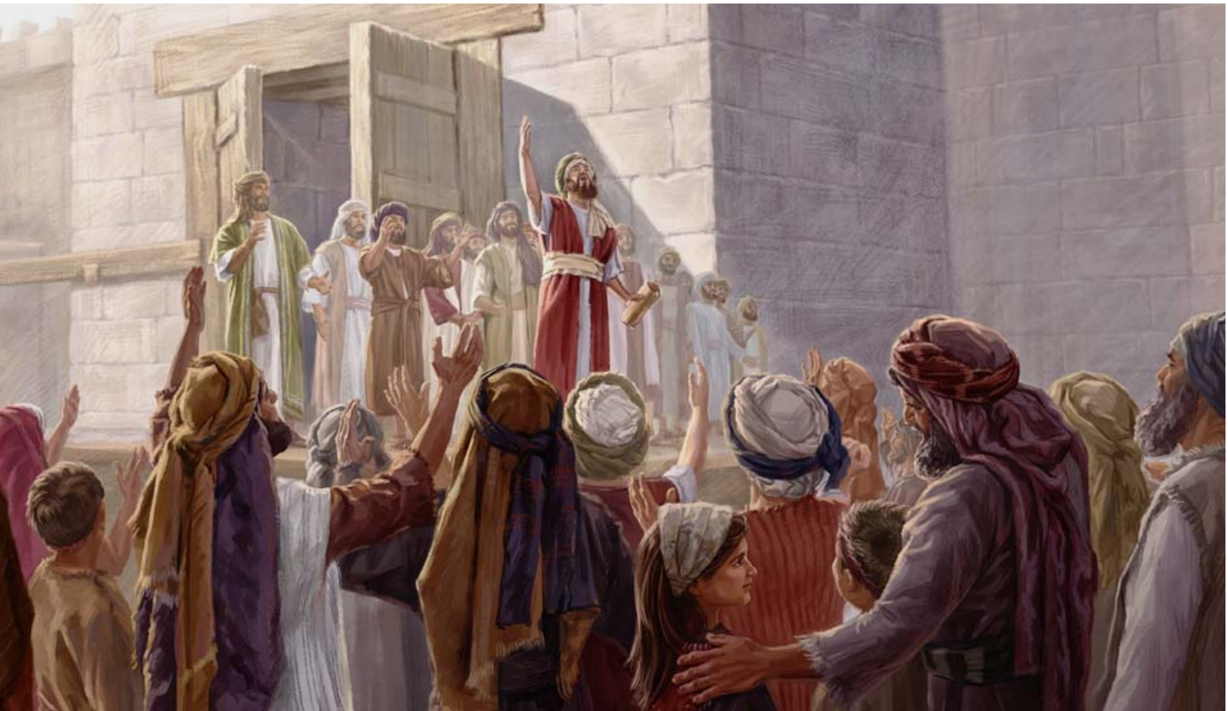
9. How did Jehovah help the returned exiles to become united?

this: "Some of the descendants of Judah, of Benjamin, of Ephraim, and of Manasseh settled in Jerusalem." (1 Chron. 9:2, 3; Ezra 6:17) Indeed, just as Jehovah had foretold, members of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel were joined, or united, with members of the two-tribe kingdom of Judah.

8 Some 200 years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had prophesied about what would happen to Israel and Judah after their captivity. He foretold that Jehovah would begin to gather "the dispersed ones of Israel" and "the scattered ones of Judah from the four corners of the earth," including "out of Assyria." (Isa. 11:12, 13, 16) And indeed, as Jehovah had foretold, he took *"the Israelites* from among the *nations."* (Ezek. 37:21) Note two significant aspects: At this point, Jehovah no longer referred to the exiles as "Judah" and "Ephraim" but as "the Israelites"—one group. Further, the Israelites were described as coming, not from one nation, Babylon, but from several nations—in fact, "from every direction."

9 After the exiles' return to Israel, how did Jehovah help them to become united? He provided Israel with spiritual shepherds, such as Zerubbabel, High Priest Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah. God also raised up the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. All these faithful men exerted themselves in encouraging the nation to follow God's instructions. (Neh.

Jehovah provided spiritual shepherds to help his people to become united
SEE PARAGRAPH 9



8:2, 3) In addition, Jehovah protected the nation of Israel by defeating conspiracies plotted by the enemies of God's people.—Esther 9:24, 25; Zech. 4:6.

10 Nevertheless, despite all the loving provisions of Jehovah, most Israelites failed to adhere to pure worship. Their actions are recorded in the Bible books that were written after the return of the exiles. (Ezra 9:1-3; Neh. 13:1, 2, 15) In fact, within a century after their return, the Israelites deviated so far from pure worship that Jehovah had to urge them: "Return to me." (Mal. 3:7) By the time Jesus came to earth, the Jewish religion was divided into several sects that were led by unfaithful shepherds. (Matt. 16:6; Mark 7:5-8) Satan had succeeded in preventing any achievement of full unity. Even so, Jehovah's prophecy of unification would without fail come true. How?

"My Servant David Will Be Their King"

11 **Read Ezekiel 37:24.** Jehovah revealed that his unification prophecy would see its complete fulfillment among his people only after his "servant David," Jesus, would begin to rule as King, which happened in 1914.[2] (2 Sam. 7:16; Luke 1:32) By that time, natural Israel had been replaced by spiritual Israel, the anointed. (Jer. 31:33; Gal. 3:29) Satan, especially after his ouster from heaven, again set out to destroy the unity of God's people. (Rev. 12:7-10) For instance, after Brother Russell's death in 1916, Satan saw an opportunity to cause division among the anointed by means of the actions of apostates. Before long, however, those apostates left the organization. Satan also succeeded in having the brothers who were taking the lead at the time thrown into prison, but even that did not bring an end to Jehovah's people. The anointed brothers who remained faithful to Jehovah maintained their unity.

12 Hence, contrary to what had happened to natural Israel, spiritual Israel withstood Satan's divisive schemes. Why have Satan's efforts failed? Because the anointed have done their best to adhere to Jehovah's standards. As a result, they have had the protection of their King, Jesus Christ, who is continuing his conquest against Satan.—Rev. 6:2.

Jehovah Will Cause His Worshippers to "Become One"

13 What significance does the prophecy of the unification of the two sticks have in our time? Keep in mind that the

10. Satan eventually succeeded in doing what?

11. (a) What did Jehovah reveal about his unification prophecy? (b) What did Satan again try to do after his ouster from heaven?

12. Why have Satan's efforts to divide spiritual Israel failed?

13. What important truth does the prophecy about the unification of the two sticks teach us?

FOOTNOTE

[2] This prophecy is discussed in detail in Chapter 8 of this publication.

14. Since 1919, how has the prophecy of the joining of the sticks seen its greater fulfillment?

15. How are the prophetic statements found at Ezekiel 37:26, 27 being fulfilled today?

16. What prophecy did Zechariah give regarding the unification of spiritual Israel with those having an earthly hope?

point of the prophecy was to illustrate how two groups would become united. Above all, the prophecy highlights that this unity is brought about by Jehovah. So, what important truth about pure worship does this prophetic illustration of the joining of the two sticks highlight? Put simply, this: Jehovah himself will cause his worshippers to "become one."—Ezek. 37:19.

14 Since 1919, after God's people had been spiritually cleansed and had begun to enter a spiritual paradise, the prophecy of the joining of the sticks began to see its greater fulfillment. At that time, the majority of those brought together in unity had the hope of becoming kings and priests in heaven. (Rev. 20:6) Symbolically, these anointed ones were like the stick "for Judah"—a nation that included Davidic kings and Levitical priests. However, as time went on, these spiritual Jews were joined by more and more of those with an earthly hope. Such ones were like "the stick of Ephraim" —a nation that did not include Davidic kings and Levitical priests. Together, both groups serve unitedly as Jehovah's people under their one King, Jesus Christ.—Ezek. 37:24.

"They Will Be My People"

15 Ezekiel's prophecy itself suggests that many individuals would be moved to join the anointed in pure worship. Jehovah stated about his people: "I will . . . make them *many*" and, "my *tent* will be over them." (Ezek. 37:26, 27; ftn.) These statements bring to mind what was prophesied to the apostle John some 700 years after Ezekiel's time, namely, that "the One seated on the throne [would] spread his tent" over "a great crowd." (Rev. 7:9, 15) Today, the anointed and the great crowd dwell as one nation, God's people, under his protective tent.

16 The unification of spiritual Jews with those having an earthly hope was also prophesied by Zechariah, himself a returned exile. He stated that "ten men out of . . . the nations" would "take firm hold of the robe of a Jew" and say: "We want to *go with* you, for we have heard that God is with *you people.*" (Zech. 8:23) The description "a Jew" refers, not to an individual person, but to a group of people, "you people," today represented by the anointed remnant, or spiritual Jews. (Rom. 2:28, 29) The "ten men" represent those with an earthly hope. They "take firm hold of" the anointed and "go with" them. (Isa. 2:2, 3; Matt. 25:40) The expressions "take firm

Today, the anointed and the "other sheep" worship Jehovah unitedly as "one flock"
SEE PARAGRAPH 17

hold" and "go with you" highlight the complete unification of these two groups.

17 It may have been Ezekiel's unification prophecy that Jesus had in mind when he described himself as a shepherd under whose direction his sheep (the anointed) and the "other sheep" (those with an earthly hope) would become "one flock." (John 10:16; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24, 25) How well these words of Jesus and those of the ancient prophets describe the amazing spiritual unity that we enjoy today, no matter what future hope we may have! While false religion has splintered into countless groups, we experience the miracle of unity.

"My Sanctuary Is in Their Midst Forever"

18 The final words of Ezekiel's unification prophecy highlight what ensures that our unity will never be broken. **(Read Ezekiel 37:28.)** Jehovah's people are united because his sanctuary, or pure worship, is "in their midst." And his sanctuary remains among them as long as they keep themselves sanctified, or set apart from Satan's world. (1 Cor. 6:11; Rev. 7:14) Jesus stressed the importance of being no part of the world. In a heartfelt prayer in behalf of his disciples, he said: "Holy Father, watch over them . . . so that they may be one

17. How did Jesus describe the unity we enjoy today?

18. As indicated at Ezekiel 37:28, why is it of vital importance that God's people be "no part of the world"?

. . . They are no part of the world . . . Sanctify them by means of the truth." (John 17:11, 16, 17) Note how Jesus connects being "one" with being "no part of the world."

19. (a) How do we prove that we are "imitators of God"? (b) During the last evening before his death, Jesus emphasized what important truth about unity?

20, 21. (a) What deepens our trust in Jehovah's protection? (b) What is your resolve?

19 This is the only recorded instance in which Jesus addressed God as "Holy Father." Jehovah is absolutely pure and upright. Jehovah commanded ancient Israel: "You must be holy, because I am holy." (Lev. 11:45) As "imitators of God," we want to obey that command in all our conduct. (Eph. 5:1; 1 Pet. 1:14, 15) When referring to humans, "holy" means "set apart." Jesus thus emphasized during the last evening before his death that his disciples would remain united as long as they kept themselves separate from this world and its divisiveness.

"Watch Over Them Because of the Wicked One"

20 The outstanding unity clearly evident earth wide among Jehovah's Witnesses today proves that Jehovah answered Jesus' petition: "Watch over them because of the wicked one." **(Read John 17:14, 15.)** Indeed, it deepens our trust in God's protection to see that Satan has failed to destroy the unity of God's people. In Ezekiel's prophecy, Jehovah stated that the two sticks became one in *his* hand. So Jehovah himself has miraculously united his people under his protective hand —beyond the reach of Satan.

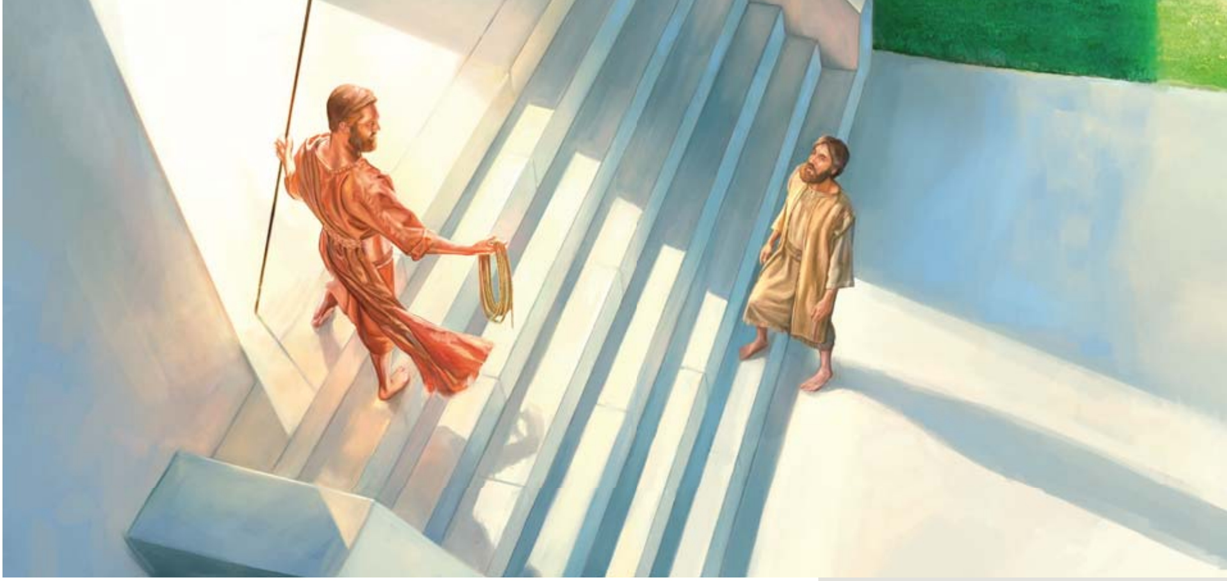
21 What, then, should be our resolve? To continue to work hard to do our share in contributing to the precious unity we now enjoy. In what important way can each one of us do so? By regularly engaging in pure worship at Jehovah's spiritual temple. What such worship involves will be considered in the following chapters.

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 The prophecy about the two sticks highlights what important truth about pure worship? (Ezek. 37:19)

2 Why do we conclude that this unification prophecy would see its greater fulfillment after 1914? (Ezek. 37:24)

3 What can you personally do to contribute to the precious unity we now enjoy? (1 Pet. 1:14, 15)



13

“DESCRIBE THE TEMPLE”

EZEKIEL 43:10

FOCUS: *The meaning of Ezekiel’s glorious temple vision*

PICTURE Ezekiel at 50 years of age. He can now look back on a quarter of a century spent in exile. The temple in Jerusalem has long since been in ruins. If Ezekiel ever cherished hopes of serving as a priest there, those dreams lie in ruins too. Some 56 years must yet pass before the exile will end, so Ezekiel knows that it is unlikely that he will live long enough to see Jehovah’s people restored to their homeland, let alone to see the temple rebuilt. (Jer. 25:11) Do such thoughts bring him a measure of sadness?

2 How kind of Jehovah to choose this time to give Ezekiel a most extensive vision, one that will surely bring that faithful man a great deal of comfort and hope! By means of that vision, the prophet is transported back to his homeland and set down on a very high mountain. In this lofty setting, he is met by “a man whose appearance was like that of copper.” That angelic guide takes him on a thorough tour of an imposing temple complex. **(Read Ezekiel 40:1-4.)** It all seems so

1-3. (a) Why might Ezekiel have found comfort in the vision of an imposing temple complex? (See opening picture.) (b) What will we consider in this chapter?

real! For Ezekiel, the experience must be faith-strengthening, overwhelming, and perhaps a bit puzzling. Though the temple that he sees has many familiar features, it is also vastly different from the one he knew back in Jerusalem.

[3] This intriguing vision fills the last nine chapters of Ezekiel's book. Let us now discuss the attitude that we need to adopt as we approach this vision and seek understanding. Then we will consider whether what Ezekiel saw was the great spiritual temple that the apostle Paul discussed at length centuries later. Finally, we will examine what the vision meant to Ezekiel and to his fellow exiles.

The Need for a Different Approach

[4] In the past, our publications have stated that Ezekiel saw Jehovah's great spiritual temple, the one that the apostle Paul was inspired to write about in his letter to the Hebrews.[1] Based on that conclusion, it seemed to follow logically that we could assign symbolic, or antitypical, meanings to many of the features of Ezekiel's visionary temple, using Paul's explanation of the tabernacle as a starting point. However, further prayerful study and meditation suggest that a simpler approach is called for in explaining Ezekiel's temple vision.

[5] It seems wise that we do not look for a prophetic or symbolic meaning in every feature of Ezekiel's visionary temple. Why not? Consider an interesting example. When Paul discussed the tabernacle and the spiritual temple, he mentioned details of the tabernacle, such as the golden censer, the cover of the ark, and the golden jar that contained the manna. Did he then assign some prophetic meaning to those details? Evidently, the holy spirit did not move him to do so. Instead, Paul wrote: "Now is not the time to speak of these things in detail." (Heb. 9:4, 5) Paul was willing to yield to the leading of the holy spirit and to wait humbly on Jehovah.—Heb. 9:8.

[6] A similar point might be made in principle in connection with Ezekiel's temple vision. It too is rich in details. And it seems best to wait on Jehovah to clarify matters if further clarification is needed. **(Read Micah 7:7.)** Should we conclude, though, that Jehovah's spirit has shed no further light on this vision? Far from it!

Did Ezekiel See the Great Spiritual Temple?

[7] As mentioned earlier, for many years our publications have explained that Ezekiel saw Jehovah's great spiritual temple, the one that Paul was inspired to write about in his let-

4. Regarding the temple vision, what approach has been taken in the past, but what is called for now?

5, 6. (a) How did the apostle Paul show humility in his discussion of the tabernacle? (b) What did Paul say about some details of the tabernacle, and how might we, in principle, apply his thought to our understanding of Ezekiel's temple vision?

7, 8. (a) What understanding has now been adjusted? (b) How did the visionary temple differ from the spiritual temple that Paul described?

FOOTNOTE

[1] The spiritual temple is Jehovah's arrangement for pure worship based on the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We understand that it came into existence in 29 C.E.

ter to the Hebrews. However, further study leads us to conclude that Ezekiel could not have seen the great spiritual temple. Why not?

9, 10. When it comes to sacrifices, how did Ezekiel's visionary temple differ from the great spiritual temple that Paul described?

11. In Ezekiel's day, why was it not God's time to reveal truths about the great spiritual temple?

8 First, *the temple that Ezekiel saw does not fit Paul's inspired explanation.* Consider this: The apostle Paul made it clear that the tabernacle of Moses' day was a shadow and a pattern of something greater. The tabernacle, like the temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel, which were designed in the same basic pattern, included a "Most Holy" compartment. Paul called that compartment "a holy place made with hands," explaining that it was "a copy of the reality," not the reality itself. What was the reality? Paul explained: "Heaven itself." (Heb. 9:3, 24) Is that what Ezekiel saw—heaven? No. Ezekiel's vision contains no suggestion that he was beholding heavenly things.—Compare Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14.

9 An even more convincing difference between Ezekiel's vision and Paul's description involves sacrifices. Ezekiel heard extensive directions being given to the people, to the chieftains, and to the priesthood about the offering of sacrifices. They were to offer sacrifices for their own sins. They were also to offer communion sacrifices, which they could likely share in eating in the temple's dining rooms. (Ezek. 43:18, 19; 44:11, 15, 27; 45:15-20, 22-25) Are such repeated sacrifices offered up in the great spiritual temple?

10 The answer is clear and simple. Paul explained: "When Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have already taken place, he passed through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. He entered into the holy place, not with the blood of goats and of young bulls, but with his own blood, *once for all time,* and obtained an everlasting deliverance for us." (Heb. 9:11, 12) So in the great spiritual temple, only one sacrifice is offered—ever. It is the ransom sacrifice, and it is offered by the Greater High Priest himself, Jesus Christ. Clearly, Ezekiel's visionary temple with its many sacrifices of goats and of bulls was not the great spiritual temple.

Ezekiel's visionary temple is not the great spiritual temple

11 That leads us to a second reason why Ezekiel could not have seen the great spiritual temple: *It was not God's time to reveal such truths.* Remember, Ezekiel's vision was addressed first to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. They were under the Mosaic Law. Once the exile ended, they were to return to Jerusalem and apply that Law regarding pure worship by rebuilding the temple with its altar. Then they would continue to

12-14. What is the relationship between the temple that Ezekiel saw and Paul's explanation of the spiritual temple? (See the box "Different Temples, Different Lessons.")

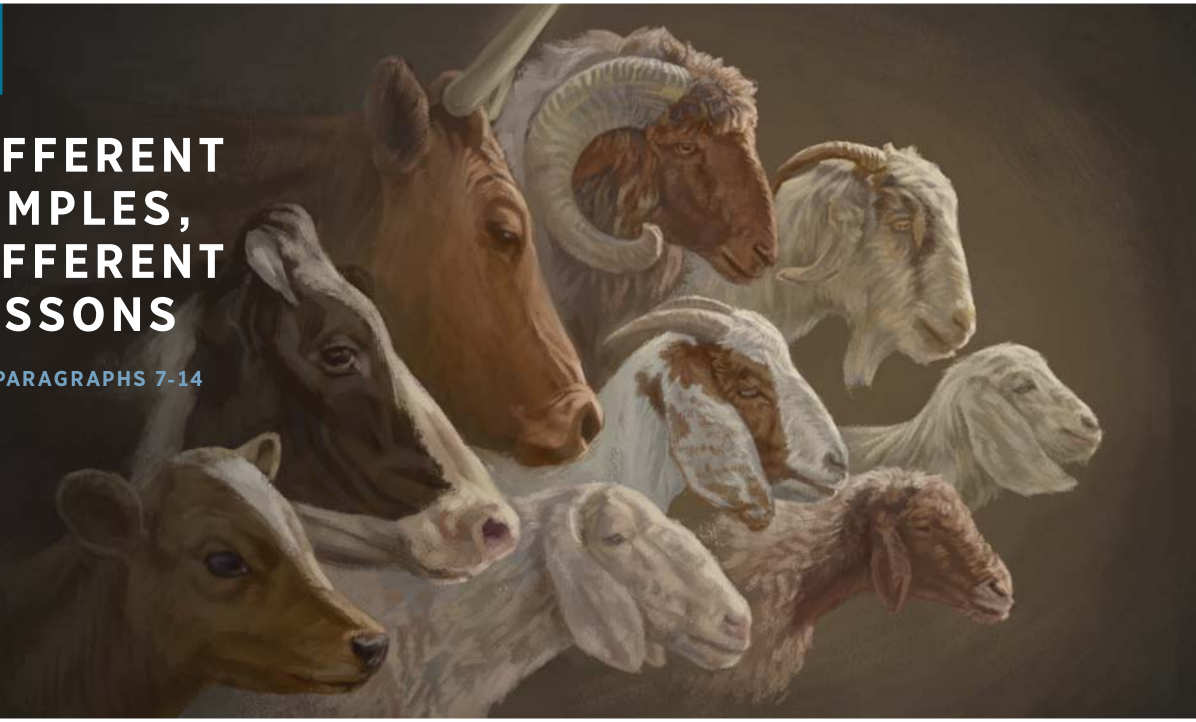
offer sacrifices there, as it turned out, for nearly six centuries. Imagine how the Jews would have been affected if Ezekiel's vision *had* showed them the spiritual temple—a temple in which the high priest offered up his own life as a sacrifice, after which all other sacrifices were abolished! How could they have grasped such a vision? Might their resolve to obey the Mosaic Law have been undermined? As always, Jehovah reveals truths only at the right time and when his people are ready.

12 What, then, is the relationship between Ezekiel's temple vision and Paul's explanation of the spiritual temple? Keep in mind that Paul did not base his discussion on Ezekiel's temple vision; rather, he based it on the tabernacle of Moses' day. Granted, Paul did mention several features that also existed in the temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel and that likewise appeared in Ezekiel's temple vision. In general, though, Ezekiel and Paul covered different ground in their writings.[2] Rather than echo one another, their writings complement one another. In what way?

13A

DIFFERENT TEMPLES, DIFFERENT LESSONS

SEE PARAGRAPHS 7-14



FOOTNOTE

[2] For example, Paul focused on the high priest and his role on the annual Atonement Day. (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-16; 5:1-10; 7:1-17, 26-28; 8:1-6; 9:6-28) But in Ezekiel's vision, no mention is made either of the high priest or of Atonement Day.

13 We might think of the relationship between the two Bible passages in this way: From Paul, we learn about Jehovah's *arrangement* for worship, but from Ezekiel, we learn about Jehovah's *standards* for worship. To teach us about Jehovah's *arrangement* for pure worship, Paul reveals the meanings of such features of the spiritual temple as the high priest, the sacrifices, the altar, and the Most Holy. But to emphasize Jehovah's high *standards* for pure worship, Ezekiel's temple vision gives us a detailed picture that impresses on our mind and heart many lessons about Jehovah's standards.

14 Where, then, does our adjusted understanding leave us? It certainly does not mean that Ezekiel's vision conveys less meaning for us today. In order to see how the vision benefits us, let us take a closer look at how it must have benefited the faithful Jews back in Ezekiel's day and thereafter.

What Did the Vision Mean to the Jewish Exiles?

15 In order to find the Bible's answer to that question, let us consider a series of related questions that will help us to

15. (a) What was the overall prophetic message of Ezekiel's vision? (b) What contrast do we find between Ezekiel chapter 8 and Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48?

Ezekiel's Visionary Temple:

- Is described by Ezekiel for the Jews exiled in Babylon
- Has an altar on which many sacrifices are offered
- Highlights Jehovah's righteous standards for worship
- Focuses our attention on the spiritual restoration that began in 1919

The Great Spiritual Temple:

- Is explained by Paul, addressing the Hebrew Christians
- Has an altar on which only one sacrifice is offered, "once for all time" (Heb. 10:10)
- Explains the spiritual reality to which the tabernacle and the physical temples had long pointed—Jehovah's arrangement for pure worship based on the ransom sacrifice of Christ
- Focuses our attention on the work that Christ did as the Greater High Priest from 29 to 33 C.E.

16. How did Ezekiel's temple vision confirm what Isaiah had foretold a century earlier?

17. Provide an overview of Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48.

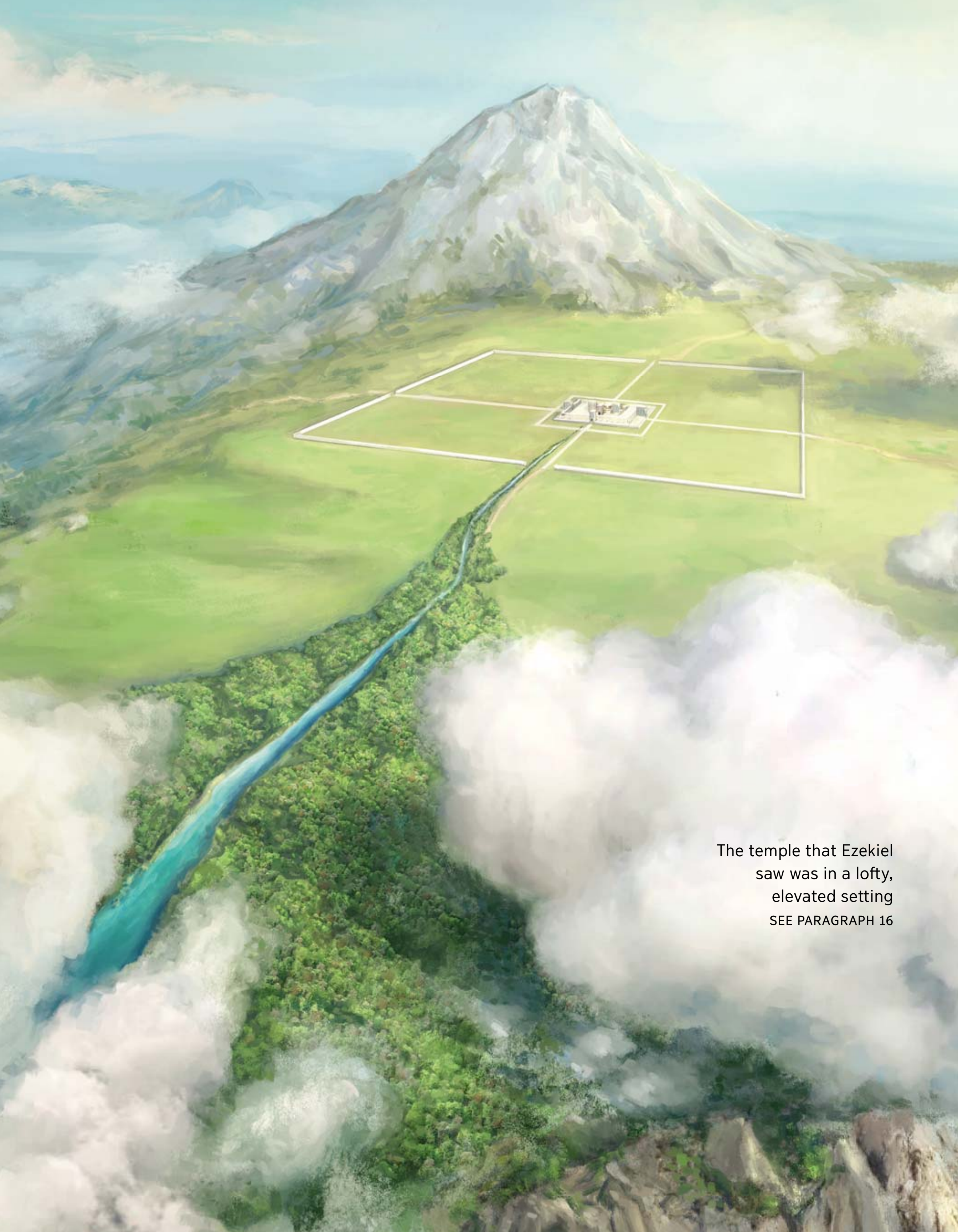
18. Was the temple vision meant to be taken literally? Explain.

see a full and complete picture. **First, what was the overall prophetic message of the vision?** Simply put, the overall message was that pure worship would be restored! This was surely clear to Ezekiel. He had already written what is now chapter 8 of Ezekiel, in which Jehovah graphically illustrated the deplorable condition of the temple in Jerusalem. And Ezekiel must have been delighted to write in detail about a stunning contrast, as now found in chapters 40 to 48. Here we see, not pure worship corrupted, but pure worship as it should have been—a glorious ideal of worshipping Jehovah according to the Mosaic Law.

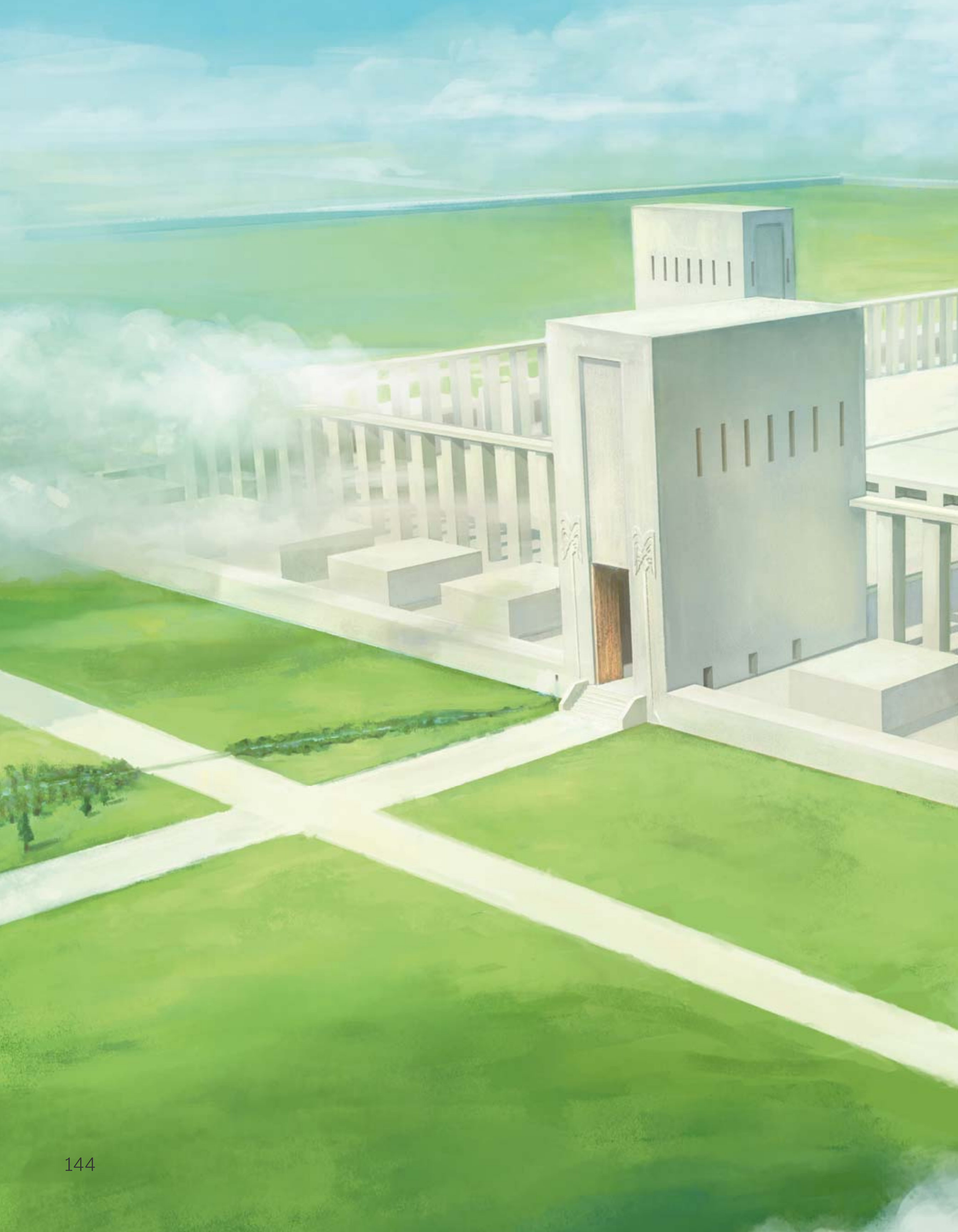
16 To restore the worship of Jehovah to its rightful state, it would have to be elevated. Over a century earlier, the prophet Isaiah was inspired to write: "In the final part of the days, the mountain of the house of Jehovah will become firmly established above the top of the mountains, and it will be raised up above the hills." (Isa. 2:2) Isaiah clearly foresaw that Jehovah's pure worship would be restored and elevated, as if placed on the loftiest of mountains. And now, where did Ezekiel find himself in this divine vision? He was "on a very high mountain," looking at the house of Jehovah! (Ezek. 40:2) Ezekiel's vision thus confirmed that pure worship would be restored.

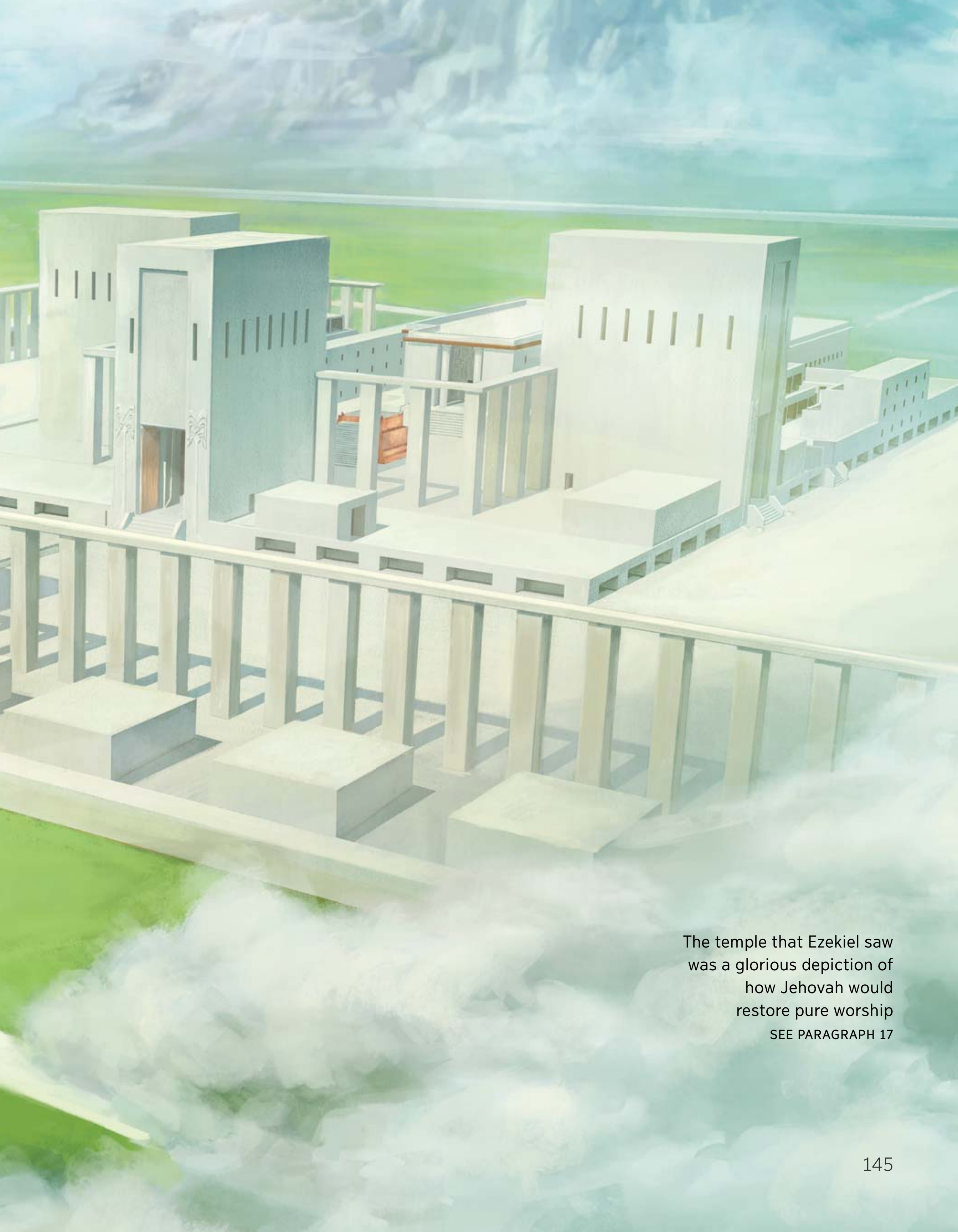
17 Consider a brief overview of what Ezekiel saw and heard, as recorded in Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48. He watched as the angel measured the gates, the wall, the courtyards, and the sanctuary of the temple. (Ezek. 40-42) Then came a thrilling event: Jehovah's glorious arrival at the temple! Jehovah gave counsel to his wayward people, to the priests, and to the chieftains. (Ezek. 43:1-12; 44:10-31; 45:9-12) Ezekiel saw a river flowing from the sanctuary, bringing life and blessings as it emptied into the Dead Sea. (Ezek. 47:1-12) And he saw the land itself divided into precise parcels, with pure worship taking its place near the center of the land. (Ezek. 45:1-8; 47:13–48:35) What was the overall impression? Clearly, Jehovah was reassuring his people that pure worship would be restored and exalted. He would bless his house of worship with his presence, and he would cause blessings to flow from that temple, bringing healing, life, and order to the restored land.

18 **Second, was the vision meant to be taken literally?** No. Ezekiel and his fellow exiles to whom he described his vision



The temple that Ezekiel saw was in a lofty, elevated setting
SEE PARAGRAPH 16





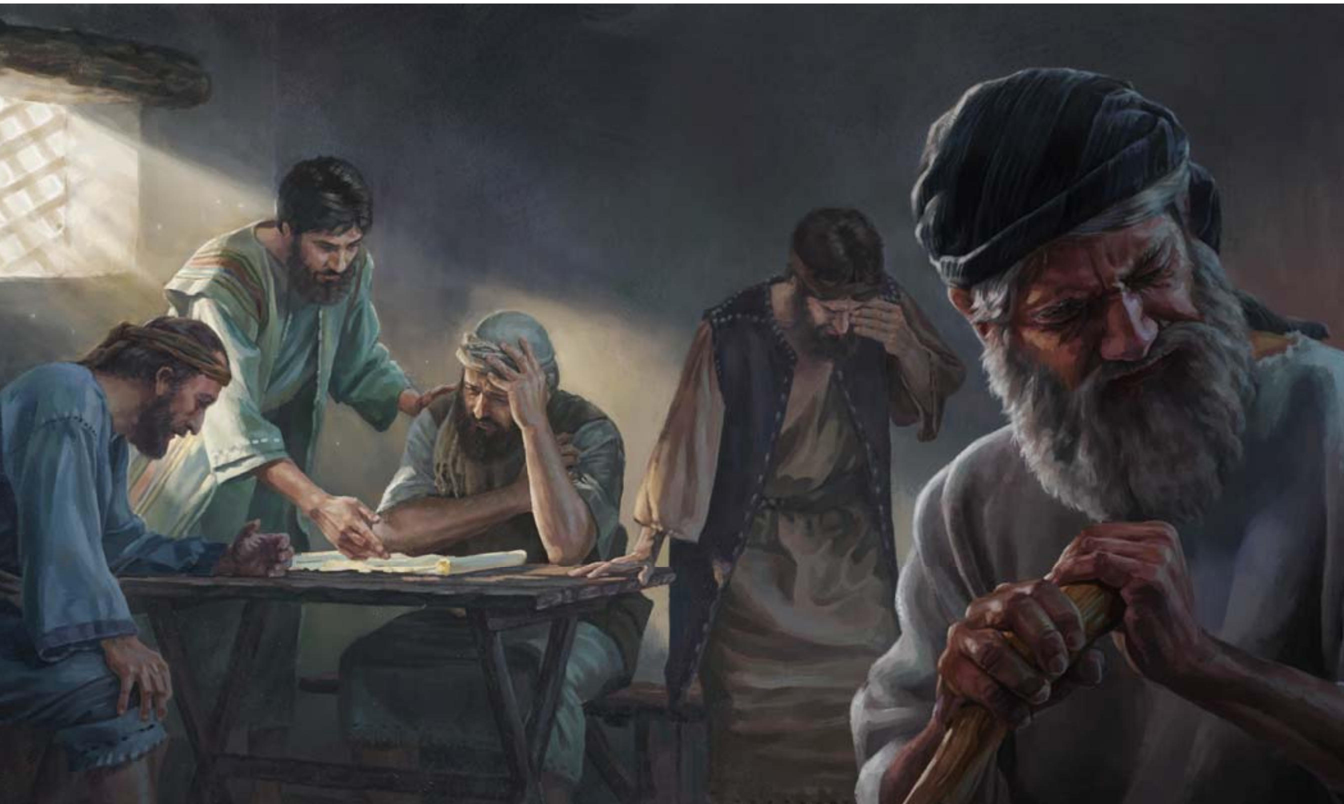
The temple that Ezekiel saw was a glorious depiction of how Jehovah would restore pure worship
SEE PARAGRAPH 17

19-21. Jehovah meant for Ezekiel's vision to have what effect on the people, and why might it move them in that way?

likely saw immediately that it was not meant to be taken literally. Why not? Recall that Ezekiel saw this temple on "a very high mountain." While that tied in nicely with Isaiah's prophecy, it did not fit the physical location of the temple. Solomon's temple had been situated on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, and that was where it would one day be rebuilt. But was that "a very high mountain"? No. In fact, Mount Moriah is ringed by other summits that are of equal or greater height. Also, the temple complex that Ezekiel saw was huge. With its broad perimeter enclosed by a wall, it was too large to fit on top of Mount Moriah. It would not even have fit within the city limits of the Jerusalem of Solomon's day! Then, too, the exiles surely did not expect that a literal river would flow from the temple sanctuary and then empty into the Dead Sea, where it would heal those lifeless waters. Finally, the mountainous terrain of the Promised Land did not allow for straight, parallel borders between the tribes, as described in the vision. So the vision did not suggest a literal interpretation.

Why would the temple vision move righthearted ones to shame?
SEE PARAGRAPHS 19-21

19 **Third, what effect was the vision meant to have on Ezekiel's people?** When contemplating Jehovah's lofty stan-



dards for pure worship, the people should have been moved to shame. Jehovah told Ezekiel to "describe the temple to the house of Israel." Ezekiel's description of this temple was to be so thorough that the Israelites could, in effect, "study its plan." Why were the people to ponder over that temple? As we have seen, it was not in order to build it. Rather, it was, as Jehovah said, "so that they will feel ashamed because of their errors."—**Read Ezekiel 43:10-12.**

20 Why might this vision touch the consciences of right-hearted people and move them to shame? Note what Ezekiel was told: "Son of man, pay attention, watch, and listen carefully to everything I tell you about *the statutes and the laws of the temple of Jehovah."* (Ezek. 44:5) Again and again, Ezekiel heard about statutes and laws. (Ezek. 43:11, 12; 44:24; 46:14) Ezekiel was often reminded, too, about Jehovah's standards—even the standard for the length of a cubit and the standard for accurate weights. (Ezek. 40:5; 45:10-12; compare Proverbs 16:11.) Why, over 50 times in this one vision, Ezekiel records the original-language words for "measure" and "measurement"!

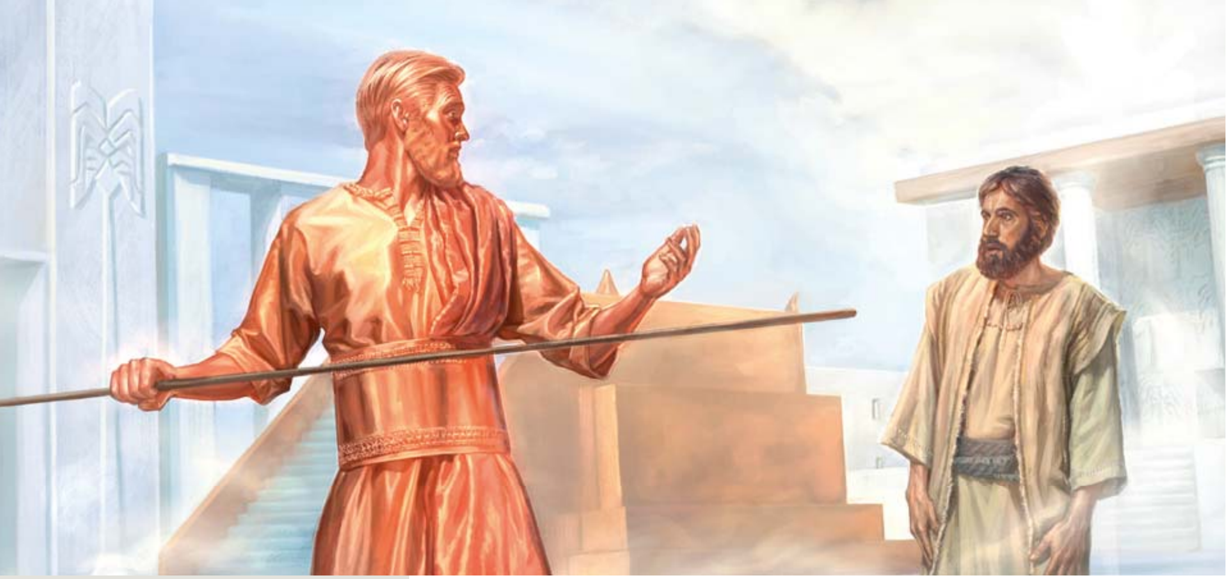
21 Measurements, weights, laws, statutes—what was Jehovah telling his people? It seems that he was reminding them, in powerful language, of this vital truth: Jehovah alone sets the standards for pure worship. Those who had departed from those standards needed to feel ashamed! In what ways, though, did the vision teach the Jews such lessons? In the following chapter, we will consider some specific examples. That will help us to see more clearly what this remarkable vision means for us today.

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 What simple approach are we taking in our discussion of Ezekiel's temple vision?

2 Why do we no longer say that Ezekiel saw the great spiritual temple that the apostle Paul later described?

3 For Ezekiel and his fellow exiles, what was the overall prophetic message of the temple vision?



14

“THIS IS THE LAW OF THE TEMPLE”

EZEKIEL 43:12

FOCUS: *The temple vision—practical lessons for Ezekiel’s day and what it means for us today*

1, 2. (a) What did we learn about Ezekiel’s temple vision in the preceding chapter? (b) What two questions will we consider in this chapter?

EZEKIEL did not see in vision the great spiritual temple that the apostle Paul discussed centuries later. We learned this in the preceding chapter. We also learned that the vision was designed to teach God’s people the importance of divine standards for pure worship. Only by following those standards could the people enjoy a renewed relationship with Jehovah. We may thus see why Jehovah twice emphasized this key thought in a single verse: “This is *the law* of the temple.” —**Read Ezekiel 43:12.**

2 Now we need to consider two further questions. First: What specific lessons about Jehovah’s standards for pure worship might the Jews of Ezekiel’s day have drawn from this temple vision? The answer to that question will help us to address our second question: What does the vision mean for us in these troubled last days?

What Lessons Did the Vision Teach in Ancient Times?

3 To answer the first question, let us focus on a few striking features of this temple vision. *The high mountain.* The people would likely have associated the setting of Ezekiel's vision with Isaiah's heartwarming restoration prophecy. (Isa. 2:2) But what did seeing Jehovah's house on such a lofty mountain teach them? It taught them that pure worship should be exalted, lifted up, held high above all else. Of course, pure worship is naturally exalted, for it is an arrangement from the One who is "exalted far above all other gods." (Ps. 97:9) But the people had not been doing their part. For centuries, they had repeatedly allowed pure worship to become debased, abandoned, polluted. Seeing God's sacred house exalted, lifted up to a well-deserved position of glory and prominence, surely moved righthearted ones to feel ashamed.

4 *The lofty gates.* Early in the vision, Ezekiel watched his angelic guide measuring the gates. Those structures were about 100 feet in height! (Ezek. 40:14) There were guard chambers within those entryways. What might all of this have suggested to those who studied this plan? Jehovah told Ezekiel: "Pay close attention to the entryway of the temple." Why? Because the people had been bringing individuals who were "uncircumcised in heart and flesh" right into God's sacred house of worship. The result? "They profane my temple," Jehovah said.—Ezek. 44:5, 7.

5 Those who were "uncircumcised in . . . flesh" had failed to obey a clear command from God that went back to the days of Abraham. (Gen. 17:9, 10; Lev. 12:1-3) But those who were "uncircumcised in heart" had a worse problem. They were stubbornly rebellious, unresponsive to Jehovah's direction and guidance. Such people should not have been allowed to enter Jehovah's sacred house of worship! Jehovah hates hypocrisy, and his people had allowed hypocrisy to flourish in his house. The gates and guard chambers in the visionary temple clearly taught the lesson: No more of such abuses! The lofty standards for entry into God's house must be upheld. Only then would Jehovah bless the people's worship.

6 *The perimeter wall.* Another striking feature of this visionary temple was the wall around the entire temple area. Ezekiel says that the wall on each side was 500 reeds, or 5,100 feet, nearly a mile! (Ezek. 42:15-20) Yet, the temple buildings and courtyards formed a square that was only 500 cubits, or

3. How might the vision's setting on a high mountain have moved people to godly shame?

4, 5. What lesson might Ezekiel's audience have learned from the lofty gates of the temple?

6, 7. (a) How does Jehovah use the wall around the temple complex to convey a message to his people? (b) How had Jehovah's people formerly treated his house? (See footnote.)

8, 9. What might people have learned from Jehovah's strong counsel to responsible men?

10, 11. What evidence suggests that some of the returning exiles learned the lessons conveyed in Ezekiel's vision?

850 feet, to a side. So there was a wide area surrounding the temple, and it was enclosed by that outer wall.[1] For what purpose?

7 Jehovah said: "Now let them put their spiritual prostitution and the carcasses of their kings far away from me, and I will dwell among them forever." (Ezek. 43:9) "The carcasses of their kings" likely referred to idolatry. So Jehovah used that wide perimeter in Ezekiel's visionary temple to say, in effect: "Keep all such filth far away. Do not even let it near." If they thus kept their worship pure, Jehovah would bless them with his presence.

8 *Strong counsel to responsible men.* Jehovah also gave strong but loving counsel to the men who bore great responsibility among the people. He forcefully corrected the Levites who strayed far from him when the people lapsed into idolatry, whereas he commended the sons of Zadok, "who took care of the responsibilities of [his] sanctuary when the Israelites strayed." He dealt justly and mercifully with each group, according to their actions. (Ezek. 44:10, 12-16) Similarly, the chieftains of Israel received powerful correction.—Ezek. 45:9.

9 Jehovah thus clearly revealed that men in positions of authority and oversight had to answer to him for the way they handled their responsibilities. They were not above counsel, correction, and discipline. On the contrary, they were to take the lead in upholding Jehovah's standards!

10 Did the returning exiles apply the lessons of Ezekiel's vision? Of course, we cannot know exactly what faithful men and women back then were thinking about this remarkable vision. However, God's Word does tell us a great deal about what the returning exiles did and how they came to view the pure worship of Jehovah. Did they apply the principles conveyed in Ezekiel's vision? To some extent, they did—especially in comparison with their rebellious ancestors prior to the exile in Babylon.

11 Such faithful men as the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the priest and copyist Ezra, and the governor Nehemiah all worked hard to teach the people principles like those conveyed in Ezekiel's temple vision. (Ezra 5:1, 2) They taught the people that pure worship must be exalted and must take precedence over material concerns and selfish pursuits. (Hag. 1:3, 4) They insisted that the standards for participating in pure worship be respected. For instance, Ezra and Nehemi-

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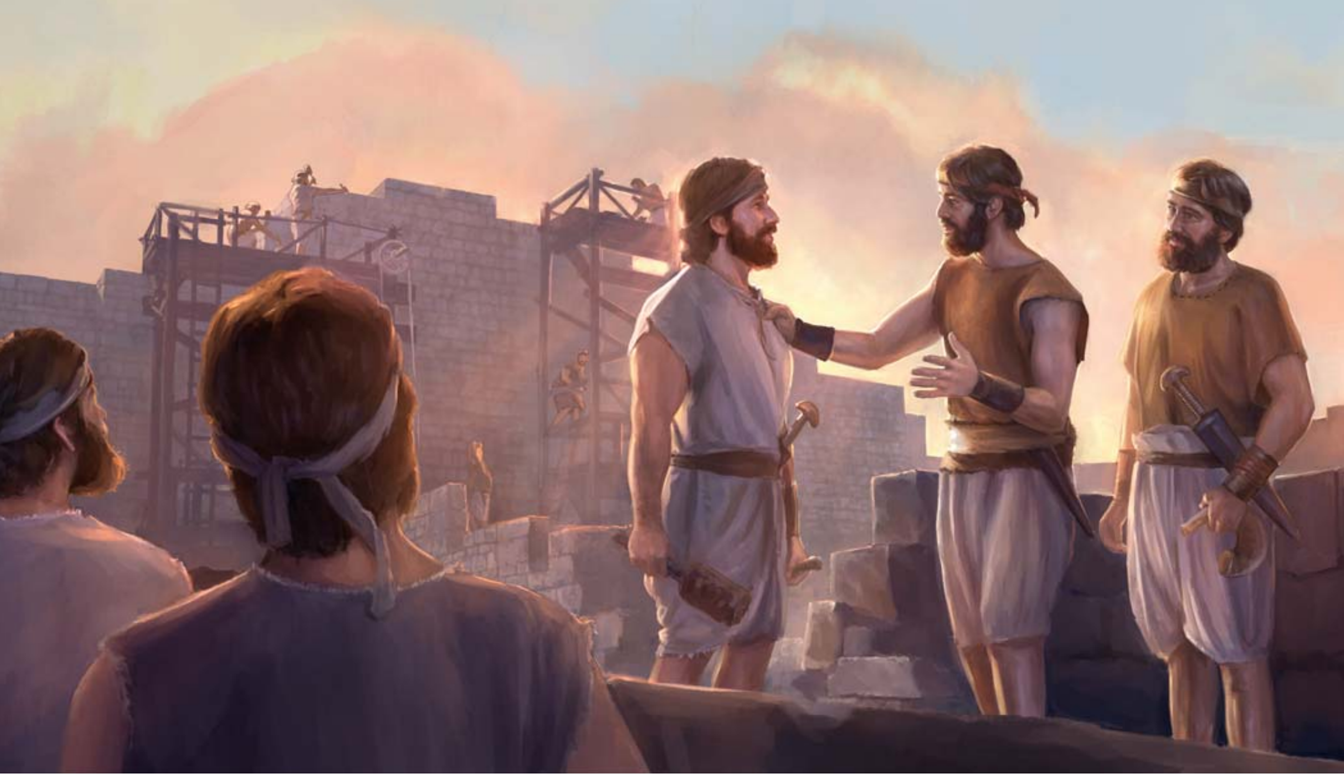
FOOTNOTE

[1] Jehovah was thus offering a contrast with the way his people had formerly treated his sacred house: "By putting their threshold next to my threshold and their doorpost beside my doorpost, *with only a wall between me and them,* they defiled my holy name by the detestable things they did." (Ezek. 43:8) In ancient Jerusalem, there was only a wall separating Jehovah's temple from secular housing. As the people strayed from Jehovah's righteous standards, they brought their uncleanness, their idolatry, right up against Jehovah's house. That situation was intolerable!



Nehemiah taught the people about pure worship while working alongside them

SEE PARAGRAPH 11

ah forcefully counseled the people to put away their foreign wives, who were weakening the people spiritually. **(Read Ezra 10:10, 11;** Neh. 13:23-27, 30) What about idolatry? It seems that after the exile, the nation finally developed a hatred for that sin, which had ensnared them so often during their history. And what about the priests and chieftains, or princes? As Ezekiel's vision indicated, they were among those who received counsel and correction from Jehovah. (Neh. 13:22, 28) Many humbly complied with that counsel.—Ezra 10:7-9, 12-14; Neh. 9:1-3, 38.

12. In what ways did Jehovah bless the exiles after their return?

12 In response, Jehovah did bless his people. The land enjoyed a measure of spiritual prosperity, health, and order that it had not seen in a long time. (Ezra 6:19-22; Neh. 8:9-12; 12:27-30, 43) And why? Because the people finally began to follow Jehovah's righteous standards for pure worship. The lessons of the visionary temple found their way into many responsive hearts. In summary, then, we could say that Ezekiel's vision of the temple benefited the exiles in two vital ways. (1) It taught them practical lessons about the standards for pure worship and about how they should uphold those standards. (2) It provided prophetic reassurance. It foretold

LESSONS FROM EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE VISION

① ② ③ Pure Worship Elevated and Protected

The visionary temple is exalted on "a very high mountain" (1). Have we lifted up pure worship, giving it the highest priority in our own life?

The perimeter wall (2), which enclosed the temple complex in the center of a wide area (3), reminds us that we must never let anything corrupt our worship of Jehovah. If things even for "common use" must be kept far away from pure worship, how much more so must unclean or immoral conduct be kept out of the life of a worshipper of Jehovah today!—Ezek. 42:20.

④ Eternal Blessings

A stream trickles from the temple sanctuary, expanding to a torrent and bringing life and fertility to the land (4). These blessings will be discussed in Chapter 19 of this publication.

⑤ ⑨ The Same Standards for All

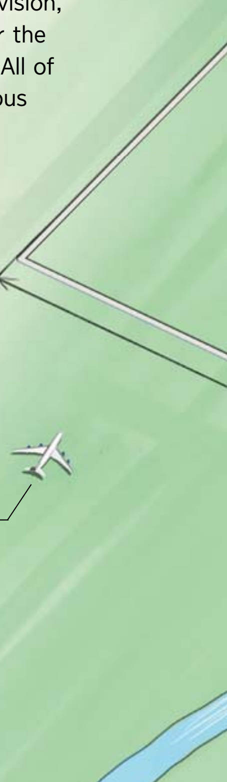
The lofty outer gates (5) and inner gates (9) remind us that Jehovah has high standards of conduct for all who would engage in pure worship. Note that the outer and the inner gates are identical in overall dimensions. That is fitting, for Jehovah's righteous requirements are the same for all his servants, regardless of their position or the capacity in which they serve.

⑧ A Meal at Jehovah's Table

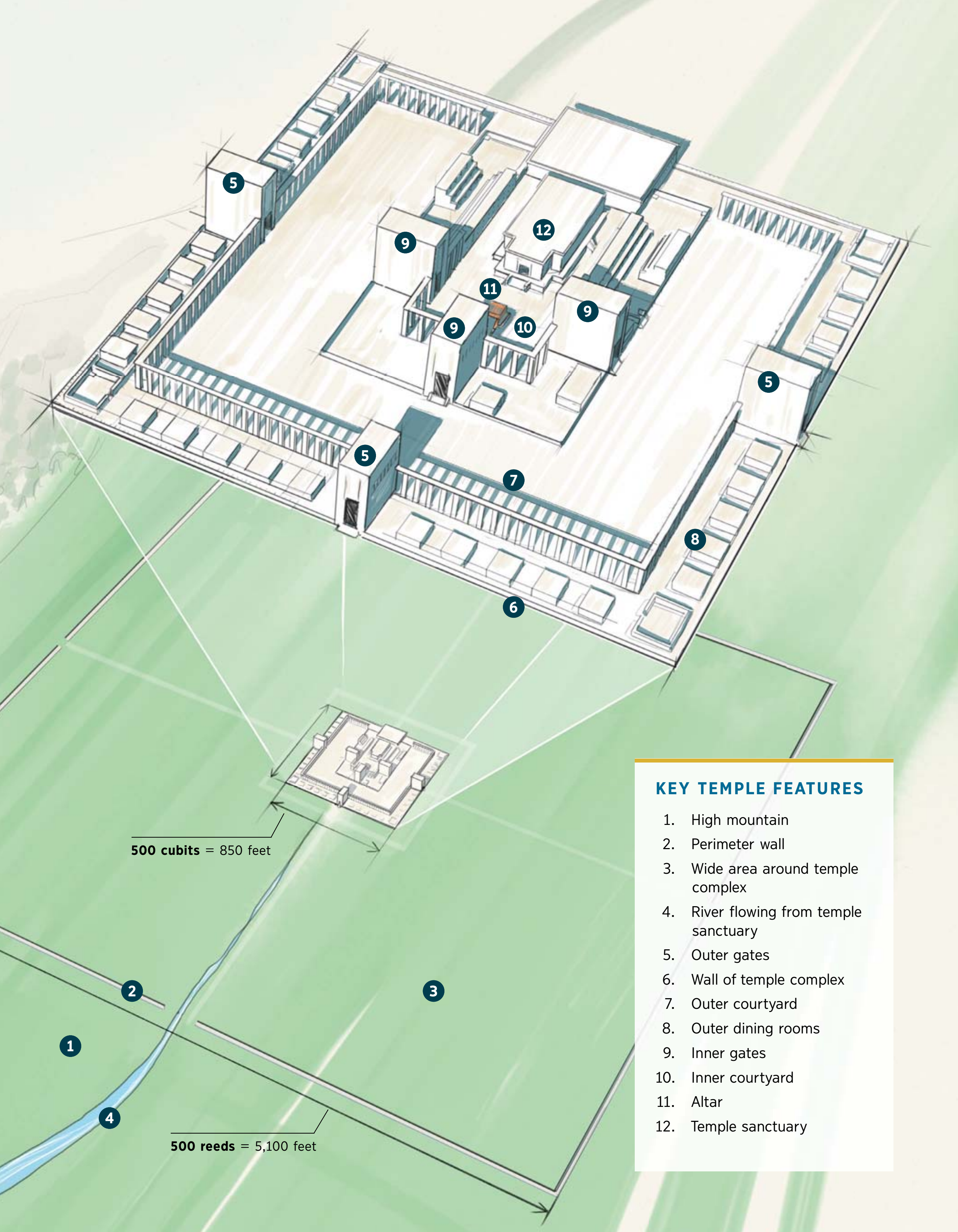
The dining rooms (8) remind us that in ancient times, the people could share in eating from some of the sacrifices that they brought to the temple, in effect, sharing a meal with Jehovah. It is different in the spiritual temple in which Christians worship today, for the "one sacrifice" has already been offered. (Heb. 10:12) Still, we do offer our sacrifice of praise.—Heb. 13:15.

A Divine Guarantee

You may find all the detailed measurements in the vision overwhelming. But they teach a key point: They guarantee that Jehovah's purpose to restore pure worship is sure and absolute, as precise and unchangeable as those measurements. Though Ezekiel does not mention seeing any humans in his vision, he records Jehovah's strong counsel for the priests, the chieftains, and the people. All of God's servants must uphold His righteous standards.



A jumbo passenger jet is about 250 feet long; yet, it is very small compared to the vast temple enclosure



500 cubits = 850 feet

500 reeds = 5,100 feet

KEY TEMPLE FEATURES

1. High mountain
2. Perimeter wall
3. Wide area around temple complex
4. River flowing from temple sanctuary
5. Outer gates
6. Wall of temple complex
7. Outer courtyard
8. Outer dining rooms
9. Inner gates
10. Inner courtyard
11. Altar
12. Temple sanctuary

that pure worship would be restored, and it further foretold how Jehovah would bless his people as long as they practiced pure worship. However, we today want to know: Does this vision have a fulfillment now?

13, 14. (a) How do we know that Ezekiel's temple vision has a fulfillment in our time? (b) In what two ways does the vision benefit us today? (See also box 13A, "Different Temples, Different Lessons.")

What Ezekiel's Vision Teaches Us Today

13 Can we be sure that Ezekiel's temple vision applies to us today? Yes! Recall the similarity between Ezekiel's vision of God's sacred house on "a very high mountain" and Isaiah's prophecy that "the mountain of the house of Jehovah" would be "firmly established above the top of the mountains." Isaiah specifically tells us that his prophecy would see fulfillment during "the final part of the days," or "the last days." (Ezek. 40:2; Isa. 2:2-4; ftn.; see also Micah 4:1-4.) These prophecies apply to the time in the last days ever since 1919 when pure worship is lifted up, restored, as if placed on a lofty mountain.[2]

14 Most decidedly, then, Ezekiel's vision does apply to pure worship today. Much as it benefited the Jewish exiles in ancient times, this vision benefits us today in two ways. (1) It provides practical lessons about how we can uphold Jehovah's standards for pure worship. (2) It gives prophetic reassurances of the restoration of pure worship and of Jehovah's blessings.

15. What should we keep in mind as we draw lessons from Ezekiel's visionary temple?

Standards for Pure Worship Today

15 Let us now consider some specific features of Ezekiel's vision. Imagine that we are joining Ezekiel on his tour of that impressive visionary temple. Keep in mind that we are not seeing the great spiritual temple; rather, we are simply drawing lessons that apply to our worship today. What are some lessons that we might learn?

16. What can we learn from all the measuring in Ezekiel's vision? (See opening picture.)

16 *Why all the measurements?* As Ezekiel watches, the angelic man with a copper appearance takes detailed measurements of the temple, including the walls, the gates, the guard chambers, the courtyards, and the altar. The sheer volume of detail can be overwhelming to the reader. (Ezek. 40:1–42:20; 43:13, 14) Think, though, of the vital points we can gain from such detail. Jehovah thereby powerfully stresses the importance of his standards. It is he who sets them, not mere humans. Those who claim that it does not matter how God is worshipped are sadly mistaken. Furthermore, by measuring out the temple in detail, Jehovah provides assurance that

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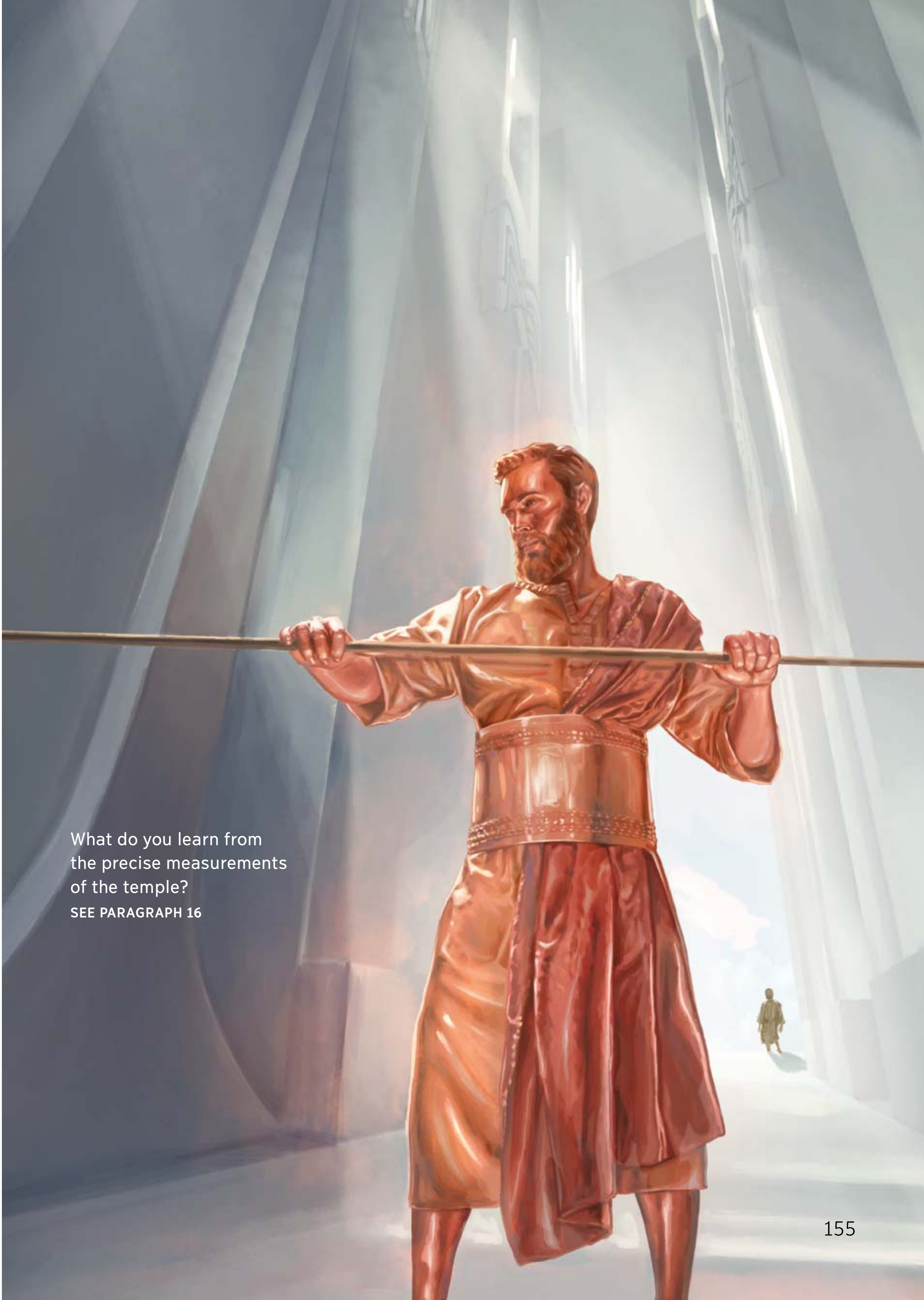
FOOTNOTE

[2] Ezekiel's temple vision also ties in with other restoration prophecies that have seen fulfillment during the last days. Note, for example, the similarities between Ezekiel 43:1-9 and Malachi 3:1-5; Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Joel 3:18.



What do you learn from the precise measurements of the temple?

SEE PARAGRAPH 16

17. What might the temple's perimeter wall remind us of today?

18, 19. (a) What can we learn from the tall gates of the visionary temple? (b) How should we respond to those who seek to lower Jehovah's high standards? Give an example.

the restoration of pure worship is an absolute certainty. The exact fulfillment of God's promise is as sure as those precise measurements. Ezekiel thus confirms that the restoration of pure worship in the last days is a sure thing!

17 *The perimeter wall.* As we have discussed, Ezekiel saw a wall around the entire visionary temple area. That feature was a strong reminder that God's people were to keep all religious uncleanness far away from pure worship, never contaminating God's house. **(Read Ezekiel 43:7-9.)** How we need the same counsel today! After God's people were released from the long centuries of spiritual captivity in Babylon the Great, Christ appointed his faithful and discreet slave in 1919. Especially since then, God's people have worked hard to get rid of false doctrines and practices mixed with idolatry and paganism. We are careful to keep spiritual uncleanness far away from pure worship. Further, we do not even conduct secular business in our Kingdom Halls, keeping such mundane matters separate from our worship.—Mark 11:15, 16.

18 *The lofty gates.* When we contemplate those towering gates that Ezekiel saw, what lessons can we learn? That aspect of the visionary temple no doubt taught the Jewish exiles that Jehovah has very high moral standards. If that was true in ancient times, what about today? We worship in Jehovah's great spiritual temple. Is not upright conduct free from hypocrisy even more important now? (Rom. 12:9; 1 Pet. 1:14, 15) During the last days, Jehovah has progressively guided his people to follow closely his standards of moral conduct.[3] For example, unrepentant wrongdoers are removed from the congregation. (1 Cor. 5:11-13) What is more, the guard chambers in the entryways of those gates may remind us that today, when it comes to worshipping Jehovah, no one is admitted who does not have divine approval. For instance, a person who is leading a double life might enter a Kingdom Hall, but he cannot gain Jehovah's approval until he makes things right with God. (Jas. 4:8) What a marvelous protection for pure worship in these debased, immoral times!

19 The Bible foretold that this world would become debased before the end. "Wicked men and impostors," we read, "will advance from bad to worse, misleading and being misled." (2 Tim. 3:13) More and more people today are being misled into thinking that Jehovah's high standards are overly strict, out-of-date, or just wrong. Will you be misled? For example,

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FOOTNOTE

[3] The spiritual temple first came into existence in 29 C.E. when Jesus was baptized and began his work as High Priest. However, pure worship was widely neglected on earth for centuries after the death of Jesus' apostles. It is particularly since 1919 that true worship has been exalted.

What do the tall gates and the courtyards teach us about our worship?
SEE PARAGRAPHS 18-21

if someone tries to convince you that God's standards regarding homosexual conduct are mistaken, will you agree with him? Or will you agree with Jehovah God, whose Word clearly states that those who carry out such acts are "working what is obscene"? God warns us against approving of immoral conduct. (Rom. 1:24-27, 32) When confronted with such issues, we do well to picture Ezekiel's visionary temple with those lofty gates and remember: Jehovah does not lower his righteous standards, regardless of pressures from this wicked world. Do we agree with our heavenly Father and stand up for what is right?

20 *The courtyards.* When Ezekiel saw the temple's broad outer courtyard, he must have been thrilled to think of how many happy worshippers of Jehovah could gather there. Today, Christians worship in a far more sacred place. Those who make up the "great crowd" of worshippers in the outer courtyard of Jehovah's spiritual temple find encouraging reminders in Ezekiel's vision. (Rev. 7:9, 10, 14, 15) Ezekiel saw that the courtyards were lined with dining rooms where worshippers could share in the communion sacrifices they had brought. (Ezek. 40:17) In a sense, they could enjoy a meal with Jehovah God—a sign of peaceful friendship! Today, we do not

20. Those of the "great crowd" find what encouraging reminders in Ezekiel's vision?

21. What might anointed Christians learn from the priesthood in Ezekiel's vision?

22, 23. (a) What lesson might Christian elders today draw from the chieftain described in Ezekiel's vision? (b) What may occur in the future?

offer up sacrifices as the Jews did under the Mosaic Law. Rather, we offer up "a sacrifice of praise" when we share in pure worship, such as through our comments and expressions of faith at our meetings or in the field ministry. (Heb. 13:15) We are also nourished by the spiritual food that Jehovah provides. No wonder we feel as did the sons of Korah who sang to Jehovah: "A day in your courtyards is better than a thousand anywhere else!"—Ps. 84:10.

21 *The priesthood.* Ezekiel saw that the inner courtyard was accessible to the priests and Levites by means of gates like those that allowed the nonpriestly tribes to enter the outer courtyard. That was an effective way to remind the men of that priestly class that they too had to meet Jehovah's standards for pure worship. And today? There is no hereditary priesthood among God's servants now, but anointed Christians are told: "You are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood.'" (1 Pet. 2:9) The priests of ancient Israel worshipped in a separate courtyard. Today, anointed Christians are not separated from their fellow worshippers in any physical sense, but they do enjoy a special relationship with Jehovah as his adopted children. (Gal. 4:4-6) At the same time, anointed ones can find useful reminders in Ezekiel's vision. They note, for instance, that the priests were subject to counsel and discipline. All Christians do well to remember that we are part of "one flock" that serves under "one shepherd."—**Read John 10:16.**

We offer up "a sacrifice of praise" when we share in pure worship

22 *The chieftain.* In Ezekiel's vision, the chieftain is a fairly prominent figure. He is not of the priestly tribe, and in the temple setting, he would have submitted to the lead of the priests. However, he clearly acts as an overseer among the people and assists them in providing sacrifices. (Ezek. 44:2, 3; 45:16, 17; 46:2) So he is an example for Christian men today who carry a measure of responsibility in the congregation. After all, Christian elders, including traveling overseers, need to remain submissive to the anointed faithful slave. (Heb. 13:17) Elders work hard to help God's people offer their sacrifices of praise at Christian meetings and in the ministry. (Eph. 4:11, 12) And elders may also take note of the way Jehovah rebuked Israel's chieftains for abusing their power. (Ezek. 45:9) Likewise, elders do not expect to be above counsel and correction. On the contrary, they cherish any opportunity to be refined by Jehovah so that they can be more effective as shepherds and overseers.—**Read 1 Peter 5:1-3.**

23 Jehovah will continue to provide capable, loving overseers in the Paradise earth to come. Many elders today are, in effect, receiving training in how to be helpful, capable shepherds in Paradise. (Ps. 45:16) Is it not exciting to contemplate how such men will prove to be a blessing in the new world? Our understanding of Ezekiel's vision, like that of other restoration prophecies, may become clearer in Jehovah's due time. Perhaps some aspects will see a thrilling application in the future, a fulfillment we could barely fathom at present. Time will tell.

Jehovah's Blessings on Pure Worship

24, 25. How did Ezekiel's vision portray Jehovah's blessings on his people as they adhered to pure worship?

24 In conclusion, let us recall the one great event that takes place in Ezekiel's vision. Jehovah comes to that visionary temple, and he promises his people that he will remain there for as long as they adhere faithfully to his standards for pure worship. (Ezek. 43:4-9) What effect would Jehovah's presence have on his people and on their land?

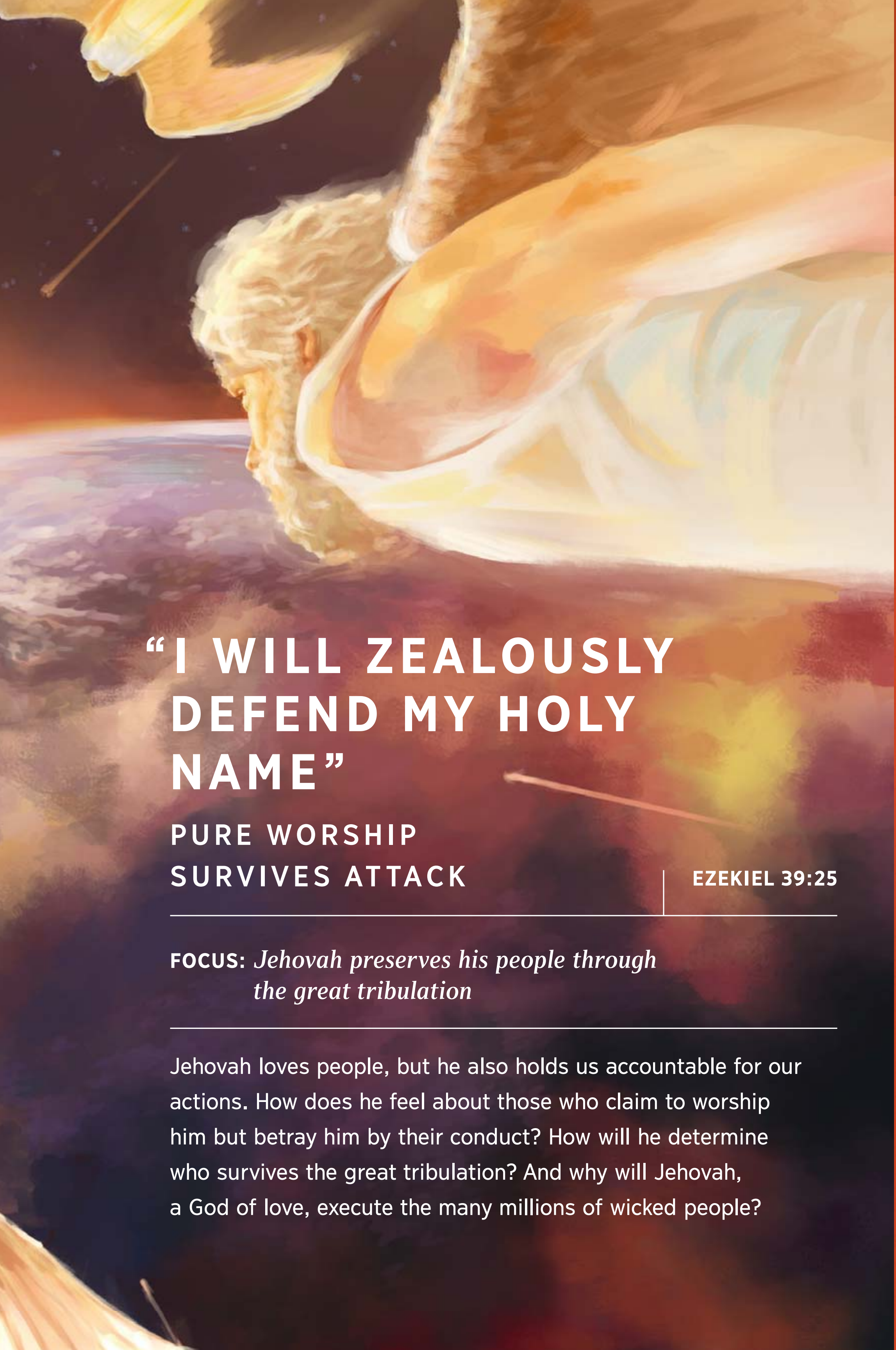
25 The vision describes divine blessings by using two reassuring prophetic pictures: (1) A river flows from the temple sanctuary, bringing life and fertility to the land; and (2) the land is divided up in an orderly, precise way, with the temple and its grounds clearly in a central position. How may we understand those passages today? After all, we live in a time when Jehovah has entered, refined, and approved a far more sacred system of worship, the great spiritual temple. (Mal. 3:1-4) We will discuss those two prophetic pictures in Chapters 19 to 21 of this publication.

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 What practical lessons did the exiled Jews likely draw from Ezekiel's temple vision?

2 In what ways does the temple vision apply in our own time?

3 As you look over the diagram of Ezekiel's visionary temple, what lessons would you like to apply in your own worship? (See the box "Lessons From Ezekiel's Temple Vision.")



4

SECTION FOUR

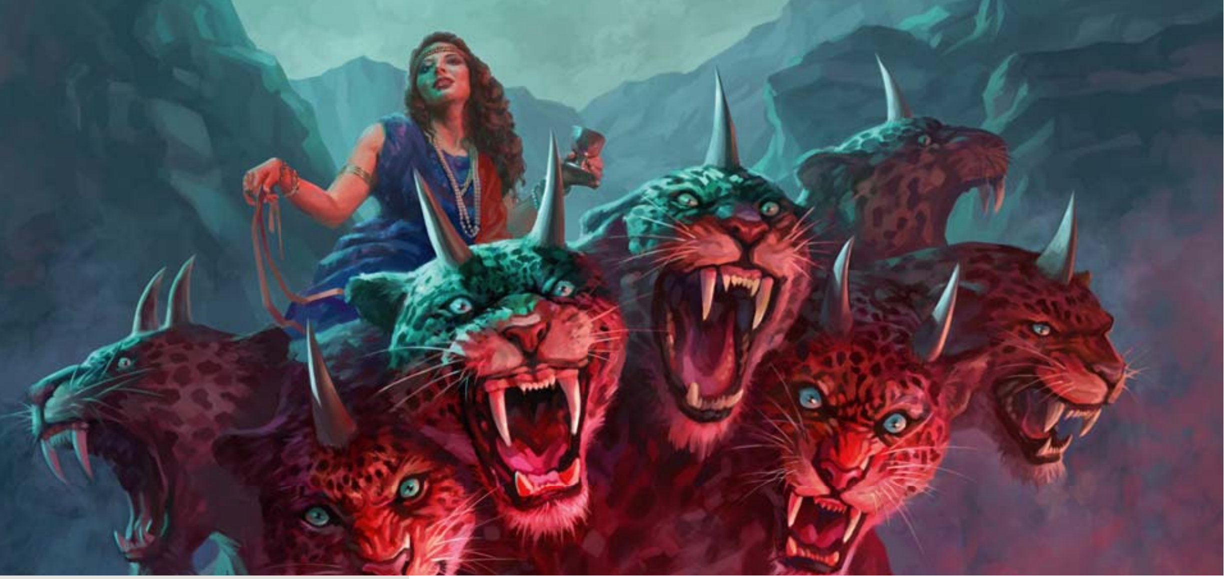
“I WILL ZEALOUSLY DEFEND MY HOLY NAME”

PURE WORSHIP SURVIVES ATTACK

EZEKIEL 39:25

FOCUS: *Jehovah preserves his people through the great tribulation*

Jehovah loves people, but he also holds us accountable for our actions. How does he feel about those who claim to worship him but betray him by their conduct? How will he determine who survives the great tribulation? And why will Jehovah, a God of love, execute the many millions of wicked people?



15

“I WILL BRING AN END TO YOUR PROSTITUTION”

EZEKIEL 16:41

FOCUS: *What we learn from the descriptions of the prostitutes in Ezekiel and in Revelation*

1, 2. What kind of prostitute in particular might elicit a strong feeling of revulsion?

IT IS a troubling thing to see a prostitute. We may wonder what circumstances led her to such a degrading way of life. Did violence or abuse at home impel her to take to the streets at a tender age? Or did extreme poverty drive her to sell herself into slavery? Or was she fleeing a brutal mate? Such sad stories unfold all too often in this wicked world. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus Christ singled out some prostitutes, treating them kindly. He stressed that those who repented and changed their lifestyle could hope for a better life.—Matt. 21:28-32; Luke 7:36-50.

2 However, let us imagine a very different kind of prostitute. Picture a woman who deliberately chooses such a life. She sees it, not as degrading, but as empowering! She is eager for the money and influence that this profession offers. Worse yet, what if this woman had a good, loyal husband but she willfully betrayed him in order to pursue prostitution? It would be difficult to feel anything but revulsion for such a woman and the course of life she has chosen. The strong reaction that we feel is a key reason why Jehovah God repeatedly uses the description of a prostitute to show how he feels about false religion.

3 The book of Ezekiel contains two remarkable passages in which prostitution illustrates the terrible unfaithfulness of God's people in Israel and Judah. (Ezek., chaps. 16 and 23) Before we take a closer look at those passages, though, we do well to take note of another symbolic prostitute. Her form of prostitution appeared long before Ezekiel's day—even before Israel existed—and is still thriving today. This prostitute is identified in the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

"The Mother of the Prostitutes"

4 In the vision Jesus gave to the apostle John at the end of the first century C.E., a striking figure emerges. She is called "the great prostitute" and "Babylon the Great, the mother of the prostitutes." (Rev. 17:1, 5) For centuries, her true identity has mystified religious leaders and Bible scholars. They have variously said that she represents Babylon, Rome, or the Roman Catholic Church. For many decades, however, Jehovah's Witnesses have understood the true identity of this "great prostitute." She is the world empire of false religion. How do we know that?

5 This prostitute is condemned for having immoral relations with "the kings of the earth," or the political powers. So she clearly is *not a political power* herself. Furthermore, Revelation shows that "the merchants of the earth," or the commercial and business elements of this world, grieve over the demise of Babylon the Great. So Babylon the Great *cannot represent big business*. What, then, is she? She is guilty of "spiritistic practices," of idolatry, and of deception. Do not those charges clearly fit the corrupt religious organizations of this world? Note, too, that this prostitute is depicted as riding, or exerting a measure of influence over, the political elements of this world. She also persecutes faithful servants of Jehovah God. (Rev. 17:2, 3; 18:11, 23, 24) Is that not exactly what false religion has done, right down to our own day?

6 Why, though, is Babylon the Great called not only "the great prostitute" but also "the mother of the prostitutes"? False religion has countless divisions. There are denominations, sects, and cults without number. Since the time when

3. What passages will we discuss in this chapter?

4, 5. What is "Babylon the Great," and how do we know that? (See opening picture.)

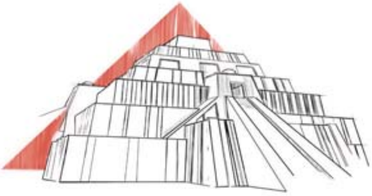
6. In what sense is Babylon the Great "the mother of the prostitutes"?

7. Why do we heed the warning to "get out" of Babylon the Great?

8-10. What important requirement of pure worship helps us to understand Jehovah's feelings about involvement in false religion? Illustrate.

the languages were confused in ancient Babel, or Babylon, all manner of false religious doctrines have been spread abroad, spawning an endless variety of religions. How fitting that "Babylon the Great" derives her name from the city of Babylon, a breeding ground for false religions! (Gen. 11:1-9) Hence, all these religions may be seen as "daughters" of one organization, one great prostitute. Satan often uses such religions to lure people into spiritism, idolatry, and other God-dishonoring beliefs and customs. No wonder God's people are warned regarding that corrupt, world-spanning organization: "Get out of her, my people, if you do not want to share with her in her sins"!—**Read Revelation 18:4, 5.**

7 Have you heeded that warning? Remember, it is Jehovah himself who created humankind to have a "spiritual need." (Matt. 5:3) That need can properly be filled only by means of the pure worship of Jehovah. Servants of Jehovah naturally want to keep as far away from spiritual prostitution as possible. But Satan the Devil has a different aim. He loves to lure God's people into the snare of this form of prostitution. All too often, he has succeeded. By Ezekiel's day, God's people had a long history of getting involved in spiritual prostitution. We do well to examine that history, for it can teach us much about Jehovah's standards, his justice, and his mercy.



Ancient Babel, later called Babylon, spawned all manner of false religious practices, doctrines, and organizations
SEE PARAGRAPH 6

"You Became a Prostitute"

8 In the book of Ezekiel, Jehovah uses the illustration of the prostitute in an especially personal way. Ezekiel was inspired to record, in two vivid passages, Jehovah's feelings of hurt and betrayal on account of the disloyal and immoral behavior of his people. Why would he compare them to prostitutes?

9 To understand the answer, we must first recall a vital requirement regarding pure worship that we discussed in Chapter 5 of this publication. In the Law to Israel, Jehovah stated: "You must not have any other gods besides me [or, "in defiance of me," ftn.]. . . . I, Jehovah your God, am a God who requires exclusive devotion." (Ex. 20:3, 5) He later stressed the same truth in this way: "You must not bow down to another god, for Jehovah is known for requiring exclusive devotion. Yes, he is a God who requires exclusive devotion." (Ex. 34:14) Jehovah could hardly have made the matter any clearer. We cannot worship Jehovah *acceptably* unless we worship him *exclusively.*

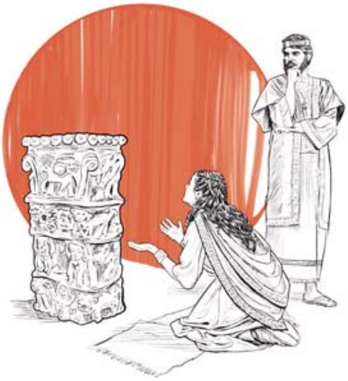
10 For the sake of illustration, we might think of a marriage. Both husband and wife have the right to expect a certain kind of exclusivity. If either mate were to give romantic or sexual attention to someone outside the marriage, the other mate would rightly feel jealous and betrayed. **(Read Hebrews 13:4.)** Similarly, when it comes to worship, Jehovah properly feels betrayed when his own people, dedicated exclusively to him, turn to false gods. He expresses this sense of personal betrayal forcefully in Ezekiel chapter 16.

11 The 16th chapter of Ezekiel contains what is by far Jehovah's longest speech in the book—and one of his longest prophetic utterances in all of the Hebrew Scriptures. Jehovah focuses on the city of Jerusalem as representing unfaithful Judah. He relates the sad and shocking story of her origin and betrayal. She began as a helpless foundling, unclean and uncared for. Her parents were the pagan Canaanites of the land. Indeed, Jerusalem was long under the control of a Canaanite tribe, the Jebusites, until David conquered the city. Jehovah took pity on that foundling, cleaning her up and providing for her. In time, she became like a wife to him. In fact, the Israelites who eventually inhabited the city were in a covenant relationship with Jehovah, one that they had voluntarily entered into back in the days of Moses. (Ex. 24:7, 8) After Jerusalem became the capital of the land, Jehovah blessed, enriched, and beautified her, much as a wealthy and powerful husband might favor his wife with lovely ornaments.—Ezek. 16:1-14.

12 Note what happened next. Jehovah said: "You began to trust in your beauty, and you became a prostitute because of your fame. You lavished your acts of prostitution on everyone passing by, and your beauty became his." (Ezek. 16:15) In the days of Solomon, Jehovah so blessed and enriched his people that Jerusalem became a most splendid city, surely outstanding in all the ancient world. (1 Ki. 10:23, 27) But disloyalty began to creep in. Solomon, seeking to please his many foreign wives, began polluting Jerusalem with the worship of pagan gods. (1 Ki. 11:1-8) And some of his successors to the throne did even worse, polluting the whole land with false worship. How did Jehovah feel about such acts of prostitution and betrayal? He said: "Such things should not take place, nor should they ever happen." (Ezek. 16:16) But his wayward people sank even deeper into depravity!

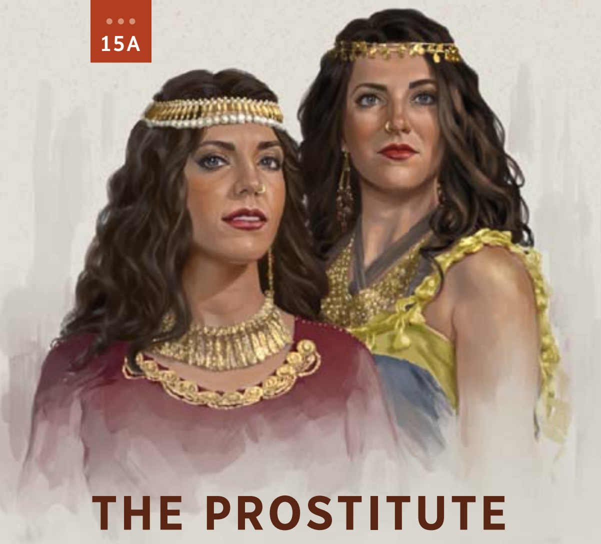
11. What did Jehovah relate about Jerusalem and her origin?

12. How did disloyalty creep into the history of Jerusalem?



Solomon allowed his foreign wives to pressure him into polluting Jerusalem with idolatry

SEE PARAGRAPH 12



THE PROSTITUTE SISTERS

SEE PARAGRAPHS 16, 17

In Ezekiel chapter 23, we find a stinging denunciation of God's people for their unfaithfulness. In many ways, this chapter parallels chapter 16. Like that earlier message, chapter 23 uses the imagery of prostitution. Jerusalem is said to be the younger sister and Samaria, her older sister. Both chapters show how the younger sister came to follow the older one into prostitution but then exceeded her in wickedness and immorality. In chapter 23, Jehovah gives the two sisters' names: Oholah is the older sister, Samaria, the capital of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel; Oholibah is the younger sister, Jerusalem, the capital of Judah.[a]—Ezek. 23:1-4.

The two chapters have further parallels. Perhaps most significant are these: The prostitutes start as wives to Jehovah and then betray him. Also, there is promise of hope. Chapter 23 offers less explicit hope of redemption, but it does parallel chapter 16 when Jehovah says: "I will put an end to your obscene conduct and your prostitution."—Ezek. 16:16, 20, 21, 37, 38, 41, 42; 23:4, 11, 22, 23, 27, 37.

Do They Prefigure Christendom?

In the past, our publications have said that the two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, are prophetic types of Christendom with its division between the Catholic and Protestant faiths. However, further prayerful thought and research have raised some probing questions. Was Christendom ever Jehovah's wife in any sense? Was she ever in a covenant with him? Clearly not. Christendom did not even exist when Jesus mediated the "new covenant" with spiritual Israel; nor was Christendom ever a part of that spiritual nation of anointed Christians. (Jer. 31:31; Luke 22:20) Christendom did not arise until well after the death of the apostles. She began her existence in the fourth century C.E. as an apostate, corrupt organization made up of "the weeds"—imitation Christians—of Jesus' prophecy about the wheat and the weeds.—Matt. 13:24-30.

Another key difference: Jehovah held out hope of redemption to unfaithful Jerusalem and Samaria. (Ezek. 16:41, 42, 53-55) Does the Bible hold out similar hope for Christendom? No! She has no more hope than does the rest of Babylon the Great.

So Oholah and Oholibah do not exist as prophetic types of Christendom. However, their existence does shed light on something even more important: how Jehovah feels about those who misrepresent his holy name and his standards of pure worship. Christendom bears a special load of guilt in this regard because her myriad churches claim to represent the God of the Bible. What is more, they claim Jehovah's own beloved Son, Jesus Christ, as their leader. But they belie that claim by representing Jesus as part of a triune godhead and by disobeying his clear command to remain "no part of the world." (John 15:19) By her persistent involvement in idolatry and political intrigues, Christendom has proved to be very much a part of "the great prostitute." (Rev. 17:1) Without question, she must share the fate that awaits the world empire of false religion!

FOOTNOTE

[a] The names are significant. Oholah means "Her Tent [of Worship]"—evidently an allusion to Israel's course of setting up its own centers of worship instead of using Jehovah's temple in Jerusalem. Oholibah, on the other hand, means "My Tent [of Worship] Is in Her." Jerusalem was the home of Jehovah's house of worship.

13 Imagine Jehovah's pain and revulsion as he exposed the wickedness of his chosen people: "You took your sons and your daughters whom you had borne to me, and you sacrificed these to idols to be devoured—have your acts of prostitution not gone far enough? You slaughtered my sons, and you offered them as sacrifices by making them pass through the fire." (Ezek. 16:20, 21) The unspeakable horror of such deeds shines a light on the wicked heart of Satan. How he loves to lure Jehovah's people into such revolting practices! But Jehovah sees all. God can undo even the worst of satanic atrocities, and he will exact justice.—**Read Job 34:24.**

14 Jerusalem, however, did not have the sense to be appalled by her own wickedness. She continued her prostitution. Jehovah said that she was even more shameless than other prostitutes because she actually paid others to commit immorality with her! (Ezek. 16:34) God said that Jerusalem was just like her "mother," the pagan tribes that once dominated the land. (Ezek. 16:44, 45) Continuing the family illustration, he said that Jerusalem's older sister was Samaria, who preceded her into a life of religious prostitution. God also mentioned a second sister, Sodom, used proverbially here because it had long since been destroyed for its arrogance and utter depravity. Jehovah's point was that Jerusalem outdid both of her sisters, Samaria and even Sodom, in terms of wickedness! (Ezek. 16:46-50) God's people ignored countless warnings and continued in their revolting course.

15 What would Jehovah do? He promised Jerusalem: "I am collecting together all the lovers you have given pleasure to" and, "I will give you into their hand." The former pagan allies of his people would destroy her, stripping her of her beauty and valuable things. "They will stone you and will slaughter you with their swords," he said. What was Jehovah's purpose in executing this judgment? It was not the extermination of his people. Rather, it was this: "I will bring an end to your prostitution." God added: "I will satisfy my rage against you, and my indignation will turn away from you; and I will be calm and no longer feel offended." As was discussed in Chapter 9 of this publication, Jehovah's long-term purpose was to bring about the restoration of his people after their exile. Why? He said: "I myself will remember the covenant that I made with you in the days of your youth." (Ezek. 16:37-42, 60)

13. God's people in Jerusalem were guilty of what wickedness?

14. Who were Jerusalem's two sisters in Jehovah's illustration, and who proved to be the most wicked of the three?

15. What was Jehovah's purpose in executing judgment on Jerusalem, offering what hope?

Some Israelites sacrificed their children to false gods, such as Molech

16, 17. (a) Why do we no longer say that Oholah and Oholibah are prophetic types of Christendom? (See the box "The Prostitute Sisters.") (b) What practical lessons may we draw from Ezekiel chapters 16 and 23?

18, 19. What similarities do we note between the prostitutes described in Ezekiel and the one described in Revelation?

20. What shows that the judgment on Babylon will be final?

Unlike his people, Jehovah would prove to be profoundly loyal!—**Read Revelation 15:4.**

16 Jehovah, through his long and powerful speech recorded in Ezekiel chapter 16, teaches us a great deal about his righteous standards, his sense of justice, and his profound mercy. The same may be said about Ezekiel chapter 23. True Christians today take to heart Jehovah's unambiguous messages about the prostitution of his people. Never would we risk hurting Jehovah as Judah and Jerusalem did! So we want to recoil from all idolatry. This includes greed and materialism, which can be forms of idolatry. (Matt. 6:24; Col. 3:5) We want to remain grateful that Jehovah has mercifully restored pure worship in these last days and that he will never again let it be corrupted! With spiritual Israel, he has established "a permanent covenant," one that will never be broken by disloyalty or prostitution. (Ezek. 16:60) So let us cherish the privilege we have to be associated with Jehovah's clean people today.

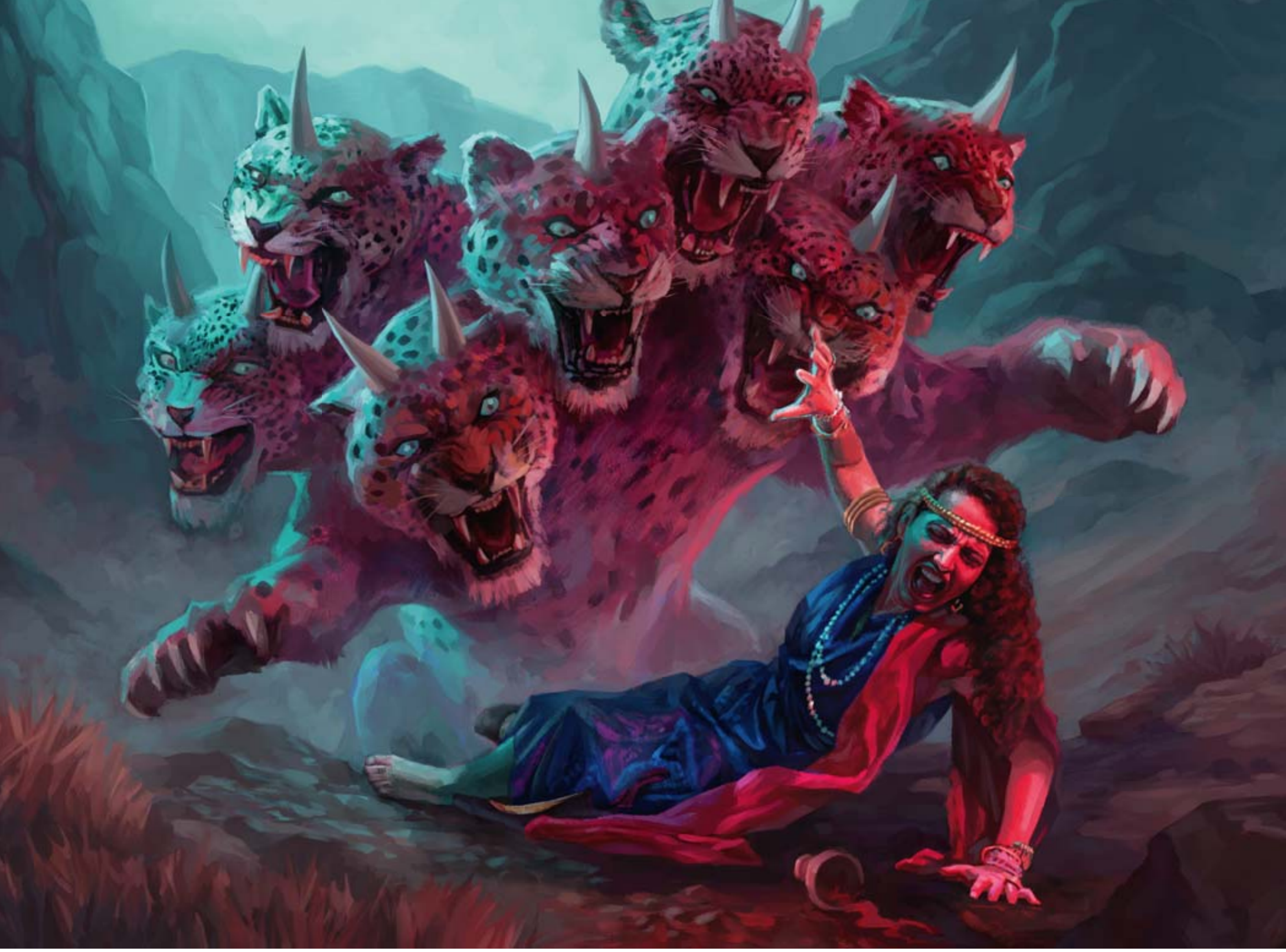
17 What, though, does Jehovah's speech against the prostitutes described in Ezekiel teach us about "the great prostitute," Babylon the Great? Let us see.

"She Will Never Be Found Again"

18 Jehovah does not change. (Jas. 1:17) His feelings about false religion have remained the same throughout the history of that great prostitute. So we are not surprised to see many similarities between his judgment of the prostitutes in the book of Ezekiel and the fate of "the great prostitute" described in the book of Revelation.

19 Note, for example, that the punishment for the prostitutes in Ezekiel's prophecies came, not from Jehovah directly, but from the very nations with whom God's disloyal people had committed spiritual immorality. Similarly, the world empire of false religion is condemned for committing such immorality with "the kings of the earth." And from whom does her punishment come? We read that these political elements "will hate the prostitute and will make her devastated and naked, and they will eat up her flesh and completely burn her with fire." Why will the governments of this world make such a surprising move? Because God will "put it into their hearts to carry out his thought."—Rev. 17:1-3, 15-17.

20 So Jehovah will use the nations of this world to carry out his judgment against all false religion, including the many



The nations that Babylon the Great has long seduced and influenced will turn on her and destroy her

SEE PARAGRAPHS 19, 20

religions of Christendom. This judgment will be final; there will be no forgiveness, no further opportunities for religion to change her ways. Revelation reveals that Babylon "will never be found again." (Rev. 18:21) God's angels will rejoice over her demise, saying: "Praise Jah! And the smoke from her goes on ascending forever and ever." (Rev. 19:3) This judgment will stand for all eternity. Never again will any false religion be allowed to rise up and corrupt pure worship. Babylon's fiery judgment and destruction will figuratively send up a plume of smoke that will go on rising forever.

21. The destruction of false religion marks the beginning of what period of time, and how will that period end?

21 When the governments of this world turn against Babylon the Great, they will be carrying out an execution of God's judgment, a great event in the outworking of Jehovah's purpose. This will mark the beginning of the great tribulation, a time of unprecedented turmoil. (Matt. 24:21) The climax of

22, 23. How might considering the descriptions of the prostitutes in Ezekiel and Revelation affect us in our sacred service?

that tribulation will be Armageddon, Jehovah's war against this wicked system of things. (Rev. 16:14, 16) As the following chapters of this publication will show, the book of Ezekiel has much to tell us about how the great tribulation will unfold. Meanwhile, what practical lessons from Ezekiel chapters 16 and 23 do we want to retain and apply?

22 Satan loves to corrupt those practicing pure worship. Nothing would please him more than having an opportunity to turn us away from pure worship and toward a course like that of the prostitutes described in the book of Ezekiel. We must remember, then, that Jehovah tolerates no rivalry in worship, no disloyalty! (Num. 25:11) We are careful to keep far away from false religion, to "touch nothing unclean" in God's sight. (Isa. 52:11) For similar reasons, we loyally remain neutral regarding the political conflicts and strife of this divisive world. (John 15:19) We view nationalism as just another false religion that Satan promotes, and we have nothing to do with it.

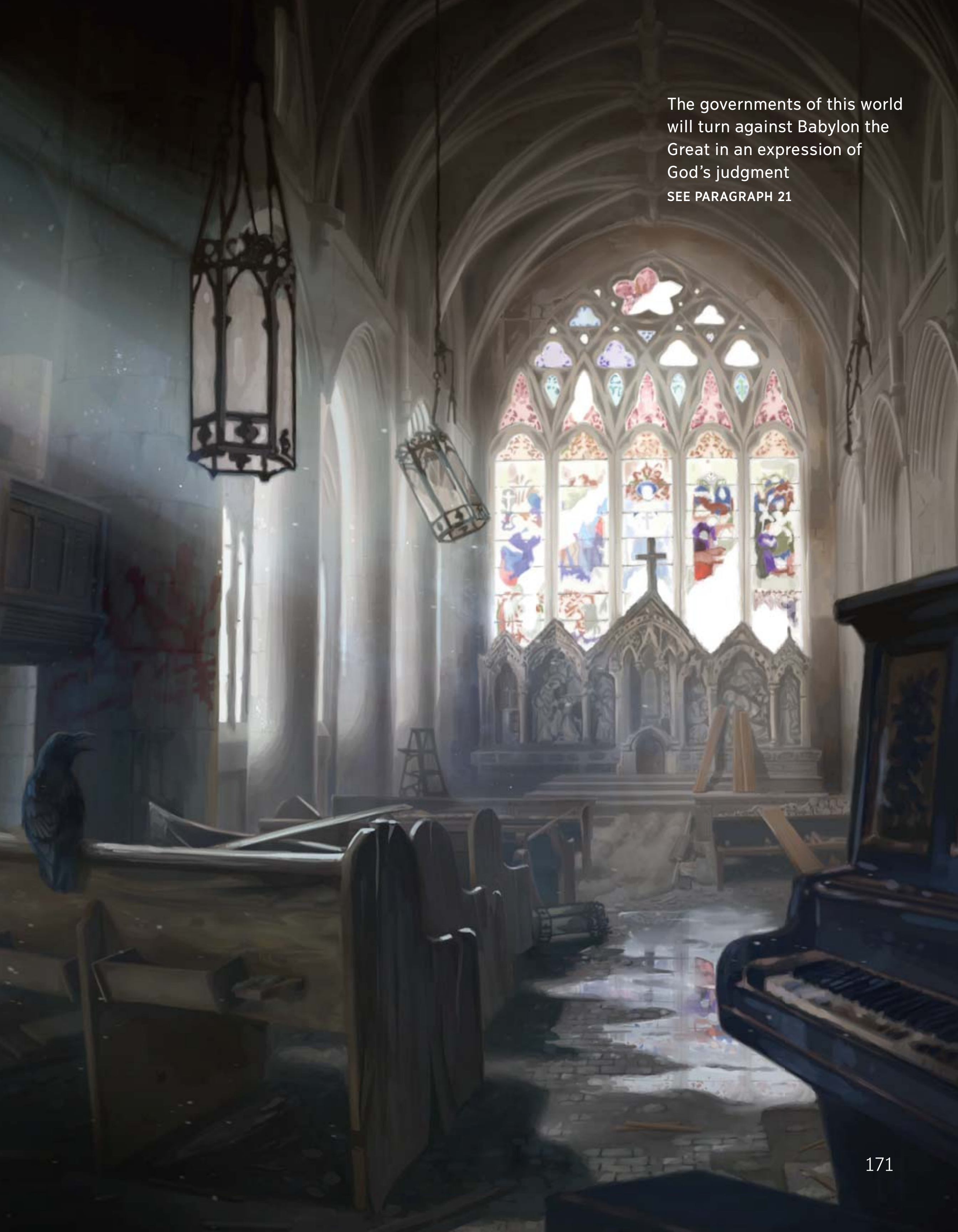
23 Above all, let us keep in mind what a privilege we have to worship Jehovah in his clean, pure spiritual temple. As we cherish that blessed arrangement, may we be ever more determined to have nothing to do with false religion and her prostitution!

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

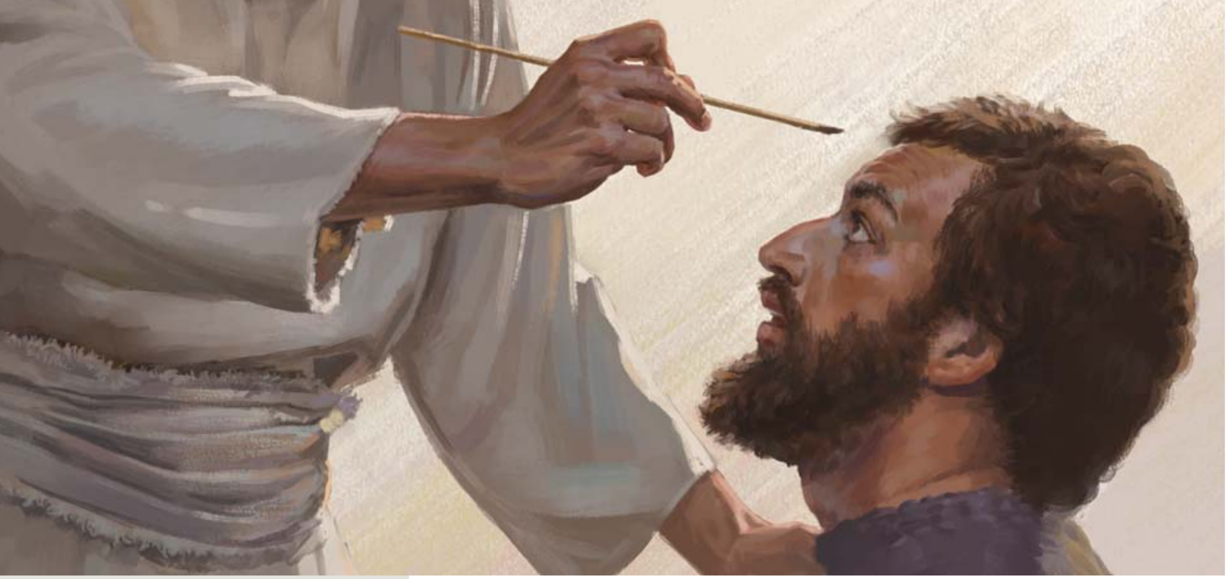
1 Why is it reasonable to compare false religion to a prostitute?

2 What do the prostitutes of Ezekiel chapters 16 and 23 teach us about Jehovah's feelings regarding false worship?

3 What lies ahead for false religion, and what action should we take now?



The governments of this world will turn against Babylon the Great in an expression of God’s judgment
SEE PARAGRAPH 21



16

“PUT A MARK ON THE FOREHEADS”

EZEKIEL 9:4

FOCUS: *How faithful ones in Ezekiel’s day were marked for survival and what the marking means for our day*

1-3. (a) Why is Ezekiel stunned, and what does he learn about the destruction of Jerusalem? (b) What questions will we consider?

EZEKIEL is stunned! He has just seen a vision of the detestable things that apostate Jews are doing in the temple in Jerusalem.[1] Those rebels have defiled the very place that has been the center of pure worship in Israel. But the defilement is not limited to the temple. The land of Judah has become filled with violence and is beyond recovery. Deeply offended by what his chosen people are doing, Jehovah tells Ezekiel: “I will act in rage.”—Ezek. 8:17, 18.

2 How it pains Ezekiel to know that Jerusalem and its once-sacred temple are objects of Jehovah’s rage and will be destroyed! No doubt Ezekiel wonders: ‘What about any faithful ones in the city? Will they be spared? If so, how?’ Ezekiel does not have to wait long for answers. No sooner has he heard the scathing judgment of Jerusalem than he hears a loud voice summoning the executioners of divine judgment. (Ezek. 9:1) As the vision continues, the prophet learns—much

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FOOTNOTE

[1] Ezekiel’s vision of the detestable things taking place in the temple is discussed in Chapter 5 of this publication.

to his relief—that the destruction will be, not random, but selective. Yes, deserving ones will survive!

3 As we face the end of this wicked system of things, we too may wonder about survival through the approaching great destruction. Let us, then, consider: (1) What did Ezekiel next see in the vision? (2) How was the vision fulfilled in his day? (3) What does this prophetic vision mean for our day?

"Summon Those Who Will Bring Punishment"

4 What did Ezekiel next see and hear in the vision? **(Read Ezekiel 9:1-11.)** Seven men approached "from the direction of the upper gate that faces north," perhaps near where the symbol of jealousy was or where the women were weeping over the god Tammuz. (Ezek. 8:3, 14) The seven men entered the inner courtyard of the temple and stood near the copper altar of sacrifice. But those men were not there to bring a sacrifice. The time for acceptable sacrifices at that temple was past. Six of the men stood "each with his weapon for smashing in his hand." The seventh man was noticeably different. He was dressed in linen, and he had, not a weapon, but "a secretary's inkhorn" or, as the footnote states, "a scribe's ink holder."

5 What was the man with the inkhorn to do? He received a weighty assignment from Jehovah himself: "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who are sighing and groaning over all the detestable things that are being done in the city." Perhaps in that instant, Ezekiel thought back to the faithful Israelite parents who had put a blood-mark on the upper part of their doorway and on their doorposts as a sign that their firstborn children were to be saved from destruction. (Ex. 12:7, 22, 23) In Ezekiel's vision, would the mark put on the forehead by the man with the inkhorn serve a similar purpose—as a sign that the one bearing it should be spared from Jerusalem's destruction?

6 The answer becomes clear when we consider the basis for the mark. It was to be put on the foreheads of those who were "sighing and groaning" over the detestable things that were "being done in the city." What may we thus conclude about those marked? For one thing, they were deeply grieved at heart not only over the idolatry carried out at the temple but also over all the violence, immorality, and corruption that

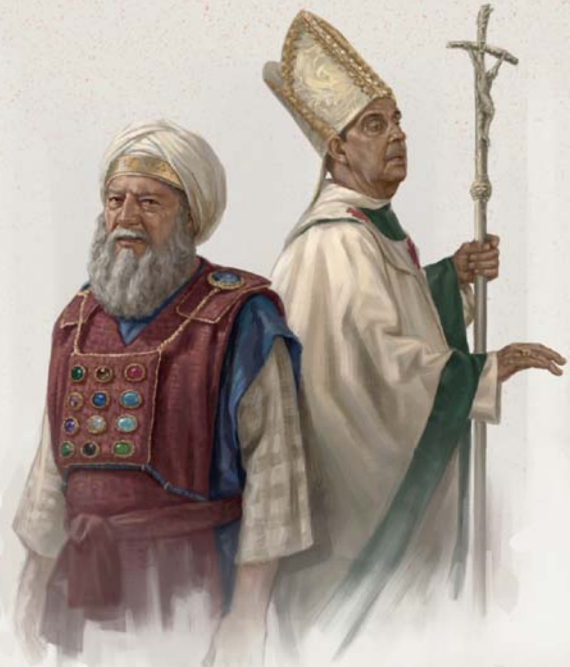
4. Describe what Ezekiel next saw and heard in the vision.

5, 6. What may we conclude about those who were marked? (See opening picture.)

16A

IS CHRISTENDOM THE ANTITYPICAL JERUSALEM?

SEE PARAGRAPHS 12, 13



In the past, our literature has referred to Christendom as the antitype of apostate Jerusalem. The conditions in unfaithful Jerusalem—including idolatry and widespread corruption—certainly remind us of what is happening in Christendom. However, in recent years our publications, including the one you are now reading, have not taken the type-antitype approach to prophecy except where the Bible provides a clear basis for doing so. Is there a solid Scriptural basis for referring to Christendom as the antitypical Jerusalem? No.

Consider the following: Jerusalem was at one time a center of pure worship; later, its inhabitants turned apostate. By contrast, Christendom has *never* practiced pure worship. Right from its inception in the fourth century C.E., Christendom has *always* taught false doctrine.

In addition, after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, Jehovah restored the city to his favor and it again became the center of true worship. Christendom, on the other hand, has never had God's favor, and once it is destroyed during the great tribulation, it will never rise again.

In view of the foregoing, what may we conclude? When we examine Bible prophecies that were fulfilled on unfaithful Jerusalem, we may say, 'This or that reminds us of what we see in Christendom today.' But there appears to be no Scriptural basis for referring to Christendom as the antitypical Jerusalem.

7, 8. How were the men with the weapons for smashing to carry out their mission, and what was the final outcome?

filled Jerusalem. (Ezek. 22:9-12) In addition, they likely did not hide their feelings. The words and actions of such righthearted ones no doubt demonstrated their disgust at what was going on in the land and their devotion to pure worship. In his mercy, Jehovah would spare these deserving ones.

[7] How, then, were the six men with the weapons for smashing to carry out their mission? Ezekiel overheard Jehovah's instructions to them: Follow the man with the inkhorn and kill off everyone *except* any who have been marked on their forehead. "You should start from my sanctuary," Jehovah directed. (Ezek. 9:6) The executioners were to begin their work at Jerusalem's heart, the temple, which was no longer sacred to Jehovah. The first to be slain were "the elders who were

in front of the house"—the 70 elders of Israel who were in the temple and were offering incense to false gods.—Ezek. 8: 11, 12; 9:6.

8 What was the final outcome? As Ezekiel continued watching and listening, the man with the inkhorn gave his report to Jehovah: "I have done just as you have commanded me." (Ezek. 9:11) We cannot help but wonder: 'How did matters turn out for Jerusalem's inhabitants? Were there any faithful ones who survived the destruction?'

How Was the Vision Fulfilled in Ezekiel's Day?

9 **Read 2 Chronicles 36:17-20.** Ezekiel's prophecy was fulfilled in 607 B.C.E. when the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem and its temple. Like a "cup in the hand of Jehovah," the Babylonians were the instruments Jehovah used to pour out punishment on unfaithful Jerusalem. (Jer. 51:7) Was the destruction indiscriminate? No. Ezekiel's vision had foretold that some would not be wiped out by the Babylonians.—Gen. 18:22-33; 2 Pet. 2:9.

10 A number of faithful individuals survived, including the Rechabites, Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch, his secretary. (Jer. 35:1-19; 39:15-18; 45: 1-5) From Ezekiel's vision, we may conclude that such ones must have been "sighing and groaning over all the detestable things" being done in Jerusalem. (Ezek. 9:4) *Before* the destruction, they undoubtedly showed their heartfelt rejection of wickedness and their devotion to pure worship, and they thus put themselves in line to be spared.

11 Were those faithful ones literally marked for survival? There is no record that anyone—either Ezekiel or any other prophet—went through Jerusalem and put an actual mark on the foreheads of faithful ones. Evidently, then, Ezekiel's prophetic vision reveals what was happening in the heavenly realm and what was therefore invisible to human eyes. The man with the secretary's inkhorn and the six men with the weapons for smashing were visionary representations of Jehovah's faithful spirit creatures, who are always ready to carry out his will. (Ps. 103:20, 21) Jehovah no doubt used his angels to direct the execution of judgment on unfaithful Jerusalem. As if putting a mark on the foreheads of those who were to be spared, the angels made sure that the judgment would be selective, not an indiscriminate slaughter.

9, 10. Who were some of the faithful ones to survive Jerusalem's destruction, and what may we conclude about them?

11. Who were represented by the six men with the smashing weapons and the man with the secretary's inkhorn?

What Does Ezekiel's Vision Mean for Our Day?

12 Today we are facing an unparalleled execution of divine judgment—the "great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning until now, no, nor will occur again." (Matt. 24:21) As we await that climactic event, some key questions arise: Will the coming destruction be, not random, but selective? Will Jehovah's pure worshippers somehow be marked for survival? In other words, does Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the man with the inkhorn have a fulfillment in our day? The answer to all three questions is yes. Why can we conclude that? To find out, let us return to Ezekiel's vision.

13 Do you recall why Jehovah poured out his wrath on ancient Jerusalem? Look again at **Ezekiel 9:8, 9. (Read.)** When Ezekiel feared that the coming destruction might mean the end of "all the remaining ones of Israel," Jehovah cited four reasons for the judgment. First, "the error" of the nation was "very, very great."[2] Second, the land of Judah was "filled with bloodshed." Third, Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom of Judah, was "full of corruption." Fourth, the people excused their wicked ways by convincing themselves that Jehovah was "not seeing" their wicked deeds. Do not those words sound like an indictment of this morally perverse, violent, corrupt, and faithless world today? Surely, since Jehovah "does not vary or change," what provoked his righteous anger in Ezekiel's time would evoke a similar response in our day. (Jas. 1:17; Mal. 3:6) We should expect, then, that the six men with the smashing weapons and the man with the inkhorn will have a modern-day work to do!

14 How, though, is Ezekiel's prophetic vision fulfilled in our day? If we look back at how the vision was fulfilled in the past, we can learn what to expect now and in the future. Consider some of the developments we have seen or will see in fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy.

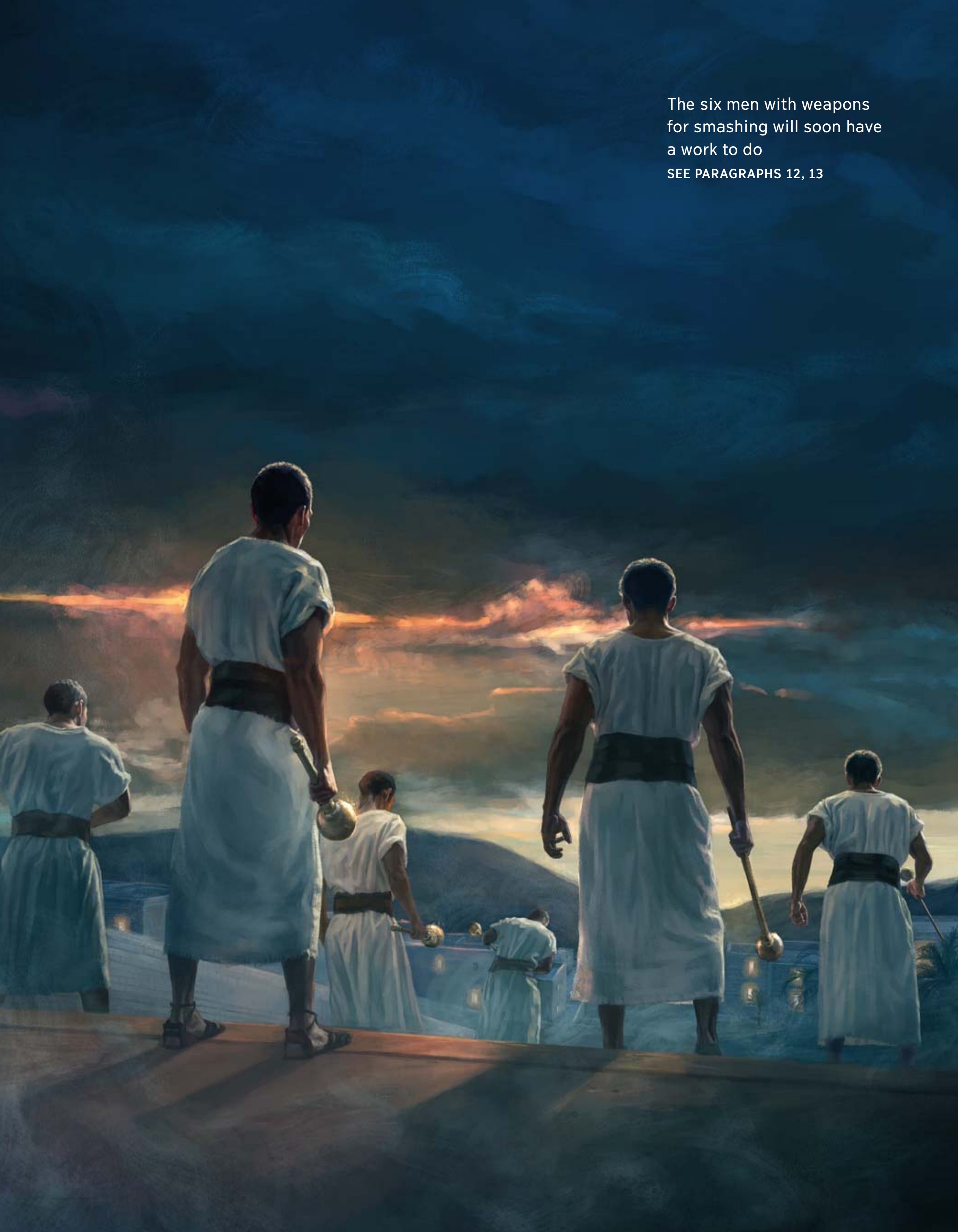
15 *Jehovah warns people before a time of destruction.* As we saw in Chapter 11 of this publication, Jehovah commissioned Ezekiel "as a watchman to the house of Israel." (Ezek. 3:17-19) Starting in 613 B.C.E., Ezekiel clearly warned Israel of the destruction that was approaching. Other prophets, including Isaiah and Jeremiah, also sounded a warning about the calamity that would befall Jerusalem. (Isa. 39:6, 7; Jer. 25:8, 9, 11) In our day, Jehovah, through Christ, has used a

12, 13. (a) Why did Jehovah pour out his wrath on Jerusalem, and why should we expect a similar response in our day? (b) Is Christendom the antitype of unfaithful Jerusalem? Explain. (See the box "Is Christendom the Antitypical Jerusalem?")

14, 15. What examples show that Jehovah warns people before a time of destruction?

FOOTNOTE

[2] According to one reference work, the Hebrew noun rendered "error" can convey the idea of "perversity." Another reference work notes that this noun "is a deeply religious term, almost always being used to indicate moral guilt or iniquity before God."



The six men with weapons for smashing will soon have a work to do

SEE PARAGRAPHS 12, 13

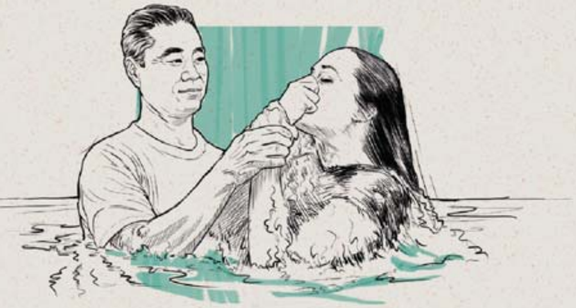
16 B

SIGHING AND GROANING, MARKING, SMASHING
WHEN AND HOW?

SEE PARAGRAPHS 17-19

The vision recorded in Ezekiel chapter 9 has a modern-day fulfillment. Our understanding of how events will unfold can help us to face the end of this system of things with confidence

“Sighing and groaning”



WHEN: During the last days, *before* the great tribulation

HOW: Righthearted individuals show by their words and actions that they detest the wickedness of this world. Such ones respond favorably to the preaching work, continue putting on a Christlike personality, get baptized in symbol of their dedication to Jehovah, and loyally support Christ’s brothers

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16. Do we as Jehovah’s people mark those who will survive? Explain.

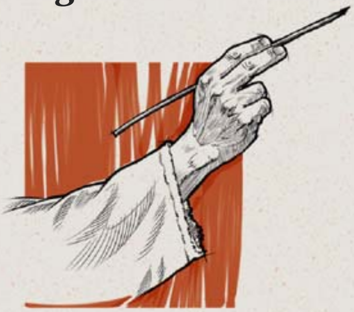
17. What do individuals need to do now in order to put themselves in line to be marked in the future?

small group of anointed servants not only to feed pure worshippers, the domestics, but also to warn others about the fast-approaching great tribulation.—Matt. 24:45.

16 *Jehovah’s people do not mark those who will survive.* Recall that Ezekiel was *not* told to go through Jerusalem himself and mark others for survival. Similarly, Jehovah’s people today are *not* commissioned to mark worthy ones for survival. Rather, as domestics in Christ’s spiritual household, we are commissioned to preach. We show that we take this commission seriously by zealously sharing the good news of God’s Kingdom and by eagerly sounding the warning that this wicked world is rapidly nearing its end. (Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20) We thus have a share in helping honesthearted ones to embrace pure worship.—1 Tim. 4:16.

17 *To survive the coming destruction, individuals need to prove their faith now.* As we saw earlier, those who survived Jerusalem’s destruction in 607 B.C.E. demonstrated *beforehand* their heartfelt rejection of wickedness and their devotion to pure worship. It is similar today. *Before the destruction comes,* individuals need to be “sighing and groaning”—deeply grieved

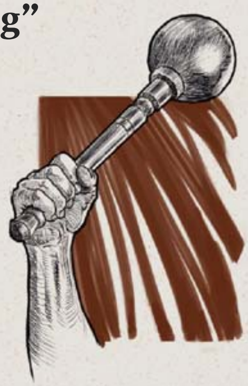
“Marking”



WHEN: During the great tribulation

HOW: The man with the secretary’s inkhorn represents Jesus Christ when he comes as Judge of all the nations. Those of the great crowd will be favorably judged, or marked, as sheep, thus indicating that they will survive Armageddon

“Smashing”



WHEN: At Armageddon

HOW: Jesus Christ and his heavenly armies, which will include the angels and his 144,000 corulers, will utterly destroy this wicked world and deliver pure worshippers into a righteous new world

at heart—over the wickedness of this world. And rather than hide their feelings, they must demonstrate by words and actions their devotion to pure worship. How can they do so? They need to react favorably to the preaching work that is being done today, to continue putting on a Christlike personality, to get baptized in symbol of their dedication to Jehovah, and to support Christ’s brothers loyally. (Ezek. 9:4; Matt. 25:34-40; Eph. 4:22-24; 1 Pet. 3:21) Only those who pursue such a course now—and who enter the great tribulation as pure worshippers—will be in a position to be marked for survival.

18. (a) How and when will Jesus Christ mark deserving ones? (b) Do faithful anointed ones need to be marked? Explain.

18 *The marking of deserving ones will take place in the heavenly realm.* In Ezekiel’s day, angels had a role in marking faithful ones for survival. In the modern-day fulfillment, the man with the secretary’s inkhorn represents Jesus Christ when he “comes in his glory” as Judge of all the nations. (Matt. 25:31-33) That coming of Jesus will take place during the great tribulation, after the destruction of false religion.[3] At that crucial time, just before Armageddon begins, Jesus will judge people as sheep or goats. Those of the “great crowd” will be judged, or marked, as sheep, which thus indicates that they

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FOOTNOTE

[3] Apparently, the destruction of Babylon the Great will not mean the death of all members of false religion. At that time, even some clergymen may abandon false religion and claim that they were never a part of it.—Zech. 13:3-6.

19. Who will accompany Jesus in executing judgment on this system of things? (See the box "Sighing and Groaning, Marking, Smashing—When and How?")

20. What reassuring lessons have we learned from Ezekiel's vision of the man with the secretary's inkhorn?

will "depart . . . into everlasting life." (Rev. 7:9-14; Matt. 25:34-40, 46) What about faithful anointed ones? They do not need to be marked for survival through Armageddon. Rather, they will receive their final sealing either before they die or before the outbreak of the great tribulation. Then, at some point before Armageddon begins, they will be raised to heaven.—Rev. 7:1-3.

19 *The heavenly King, Jesus Christ, and his heavenly armies will execute judgment on this system of things.* In Ezekiel's vision, the six men with weapons for smashing did not begin the destruction until after the man in linen completed his marking work. (Ezek. 9:4-7) Likewise, the coming destruction will begin after Jesus judges people of all the nations and marks the sheep for survival. Then, during the war of Armageddon, Jesus will lead the heavenly executional forces, which will include the holy angels and all his 144,000 corulers, against this wicked world, destroying it utterly and delivering pure worshippers into a righteous new world.—Rev. 16:14-16; 19:11-21.

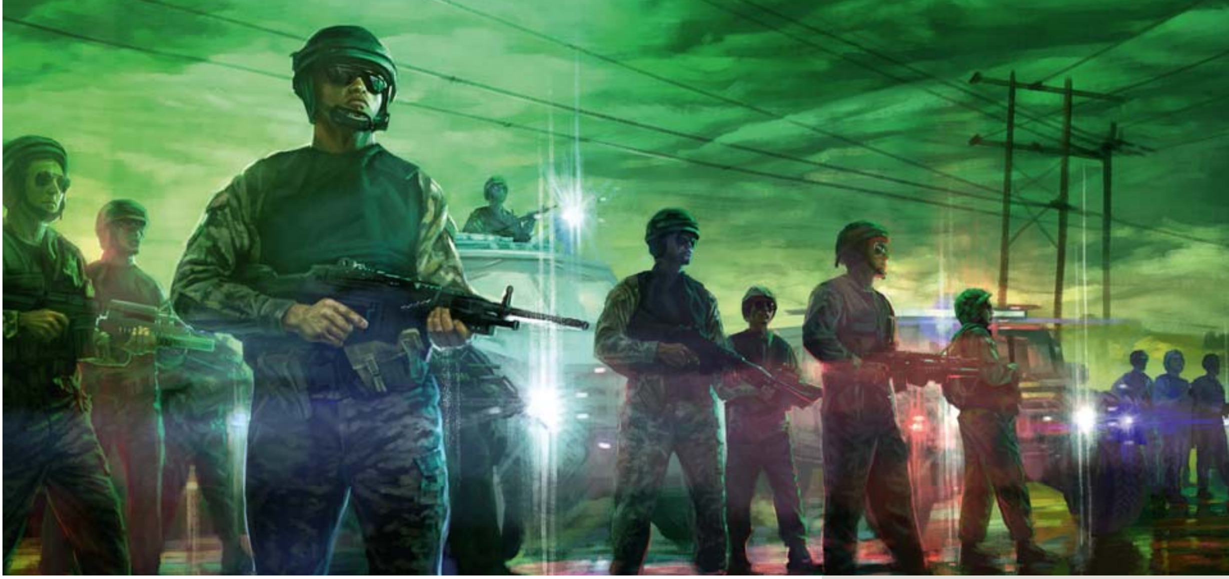
20 How thankful we are for the reassuring lessons we learn from Ezekiel's vision of the man with the secretary's inkhorn! We can have complete confidence that Jehovah will not destroy the righteous with the wicked. (Ps. 97:10) We know what we need to do now in order to be marked in the future for survival. As worshippers of Jehovah, we are determined to have the fullest possible share in declaring the good news and in sounding the warning to those who are sighing and groaning over the wickedness in Satan's world. We thus may have the privilege of helping those who are "rightly disposed for everlasting life" to join us in pure worship and thereby put themselves in line to be marked for survival into God's righteous new world.—Acts 13:48.

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 How does Ezekiel's vision of the man with the secretary's inkhorn highlight Jehovah's mercy?

2 What do you need to do now in order to be marked in the future for survival?

3 After considering Ezekiel's vision of the man with the inkhorn, what are you determined to do?



17

“I AM AGAINST YOU, O GOG”

EZEKIEL 38:3

FOCUS: *Explaining the identity of both “Gog” and “the land” that he invades*

FOR thousands of years, this earth has been stained with the blood of human warfare, including the bloodbath that marked the two world wars of the 20th century. But the greatest war of all human history is just ahead. This war, however, will not be merely a human conflict, with earthly nations fighting one another only for selfish reasons. Rather, this coming war will be “the war of the great day of God the Almighty.” (Rev. 16:14) Provoking this war, an arrogant enemy will invade a land precious to God; that invasion will cause the Sovereign Lord Jehovah to unleash the greatest demonstration of his destructive power ever seen on earth.

2 Some key questions naturally arise: Who is this enemy? What land will he invade? When, why, and how will he invade this land? Since these future events will involve us, Jehovah’s pure worshippers on earth, we need to know the answers. We can find them in a thrilling prophecy recorded in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39.

1, 2. What great war is just ahead, and what questions arise concerning it? (See opening picture.)

3. Explain the gist of Ezekiel’s prophecy regarding Gog of Magog.

4. What may we conclude about Gog of Magog?

5, 6. What in Ezekiel’s prophecy suggests that Gog of Magog is not a spirit creature?

7, 8. When will “the king of the north” come to his end, and how is this similar to what will happen to Gog of Magog?

The Enemy—Gog of Magog

3 **Read Ezekiel 38:1, 2, 8, 18; 39:4, 11.** Here is the gist of the prophecy: “In the final part of the years,” an enemy called “Gog of . . . Magog” invades “the land” of God’s people. But that vicious attack causes Jehovah’s “great rage” to flare up, and Jehovah steps in and defeats Gog.[1] Victorious, Jehovah gives his defeated enemy and all those with him “as food to all kinds of birds of prey and the wild beasts.” Finally, Jehovah gives Gog “a burial place.” To understand how this prophecy will be fulfilled in the near future, we first need to identify Gog.

4 Who, then, is Gog of Magog? From Ezekiel’s description, we may conclude that Gog is an enemy of pure worshippers. Is Gog a prophetic name for Satan—the greatest of all enemies of true worship? For many decades, that is what our publications said. However, a further consideration of Ezekiel’s prophecy led to an adjustment in our understanding. *The Watchtower* explained that the title Gog of Magog refers, not to an invisible spirit creature, but to a visible human enemy—a coalition of nations that will fight against pure worship.[2] Before we review the basis for such a conclusion, let us first examine two clues in Ezekiel’s prophecy that indicate that Gog is not a spirit creature.

5 ***“I will give you as food to all kinds of birds of prey.”*** (Ezek. 39:4) The Scriptures often use the idea of birds of prey devouring a carcass as a warning of divine judgment. God gave such warnings to the nation of Israel as well as to non-Israelite nations. (Deut. 28:26; Jer. 7:33; Ezek. 29:3, 5) Note, though, that those divine warnings were given, not to spirit creatures, but to flesh-and-blood *humans.* After all, birds of prey and wild beasts eat flesh, not spirit. So this divine warning in Ezekiel’s prophecy suggests that Gog is not a spirit creature.

6 ***“I will give Gog a burial place . . . in Israel.”*** (Ezek. 39:11) The Scriptures do not speak of spirit creatures as being buried on earth. Rather, Satan and his demons will be abyssed for 1,000 years, and later they will be hurled into the symbolic lake of fire, signifying their everlasting destruction. (Luke 8:31; Rev. 20:1-3, 10) Since Gog is spoken of as being given “a burial place” on earth, we may conclude that he is not a spirit creature.

7 If not a spirit creature, then who or what is Gog, the enemy who will launch a final attack on pure worshippers? Con-

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FOOTNOTES

[1] In the next chapter of this publication, we will discuss how and when Jehovah’s great rage will flare up against Gog of Magog and what this will mean for pure worshippers.

[2] See “Questions From Readers” in *The Watchtower,* May 15, 2015, pp. 29-30.

sider two Bible prophecies that help us to identify Gog of Magog.

8 ***“The king of the north.”*** **(Read Daniel 11:40-45.)** Daniel foretold the march of world powers from his day down to our time. The prophecy also mentions rival political foes—“the king of the south” and “the king of the north”—each of them having changed identity over the centuries as various earthly nations have fought for supremacy. Regarding the final campaign of the king of the north in “the time of the end,” Daniel said: “He will go out in a great rage to annihilate and to devote many to destruction.” Jehovah’s worshippers are the primary target of the king of the north.[3] But like Gog of Magog, the king of the north comes “to his end” after failing in his attack on God’s people.

9 ***“The kings of the entire inhabited earth.”*** **(Read Revelation 16:14, 16; 17:14; 19:19, 20.)** The book of Revelation foretold an attack by “the kings of the earth” on the “King of kings,” the heavenly Jesus. But unable to reach into the heavens, the rebels attack the earthly supporters of the Kingdom. The kings of the earth then find themselves on the losing side in the battle at Armageddon. Notice that they come to their end after attacking Jehovah’s people. This is similar to what is said about Gog of Magog.[4]

10 In view of the foregoing, what may we conclude about the identity of Gog? First, Gog is not a spirit creature. Second, Gog refers to earthly nations that will attack God’s people in the near future. Those nations will undoubtedly form a coalition, that is, they will band together somehow. Why? Since God’s people are found earth wide, the nations will need to be united in purpose and action to attack them. (Matt. 24:9) Make no mistake, Satan will be the evil mastermind behind the attack. He has long influenced worldly nations to oppose true worship. (1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:17) But Ezekiel’s prophetic words about Gog of Magog focus on the role of the *earthly nations* that will attack Jehovah’s people.[5]

“The Land”—What Is It?

11 As we learned in paragraph 3, Gog of Magog will provoke Jehovah’s great rage by invading a land that is precious to Jehovah. What land is this? Let us return to Ezekiel’s prophecy. **(Read Ezekiel 38:8-12.)** It says that Gog will “invade the land whose people have been restored” and “regathered from the nations.” Note, too, what it says about the

9. What similarity is there between what happens to Gog of Magog and what happens to “the kings of the entire inhabited earth”?

10. What may we conclude about the identity of Gog of Magog?

11. How does Ezekiel’s prophecy describe “the land” that Gog will invade?

FOOTNOTES

[3] Daniel 11:45 indicates that the king of the north will target God’s people, for it says that this king “will plant his royal tents between the grand sea [Mediterranean] and the holy mountain of Decoration [where God’s temple once stood and where God’s people worshipped].”

[4] The Bible also speaks of an attack by the modern-day “Assyrian,” who will seek to wipe out God’s people. (Mic. 5:5) The four attacks foretold to come upon God’s people—by Gog of Magog, by the king of the north, by the kings of the earth, and by the Assyrian—may refer to the same attack under different names.

[5] See Chapter 22 of this publication for a discussion about the identity of the “Gog and Magog” mentioned at Revelation 20:7-9.

"THOSE HOPING IN
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12. What restoration happened in the land of Israel in Bible times?

13, 14. (a) What is the spiritual land? (b) Why is this land precious to Jehovah?

restored worshippers who reside in this land: They "dwell in security"; their settlements are "unprotected by walls, bars, or gates"; and they "are accumulating wealth." This is the land in which Jehovah's pure worshippers earth wide reside. How can we identify it?

12 It is helpful to consider the restoration that happened in ancient Israel, the land where God's chosen people lived, worked, and worshipped for centuries. When the Israelites proved unfaithful, Jehovah through Ezekiel foretold that their land would be devastated and left desolate. (Ezek. 33:27-29) But Jehovah also prophesied that a repentant remnant would later return from exile in Babylon and restore pure worship in the land. With Jehovah's blessing, the land of Israel would be transformed, flourishing "like the garden of Eden." (Ezek. 36:34-36) That restoration took place starting in 537 B.C.E. when Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem to restore true worship in their beloved homeland.

13 In modern times, God's pure worshippers experienced a similar restoration. As we learned in Chapter 9 of this publication, by 1919, God's people were freed from the long captivity in Babylon the Great. In that year, Jehovah brought his restored worshippers into a spiritual land. That land is the spiritual paradise—the secure, spiritually prosperous environ-

No matter where we may live, we are in the spiritual land as long as we are actively promoting pure worship

SEE PARAGRAPHS 13, 14

ment, or realm of activity, in which we worship the true God. In this land, we dwell together in security, with peace of mind and heart. (Prov. 1:33) We receive an abundance of spiritual food, and we have plenty of satisfying work to do in proclaiming God's Kingdom. Indeed, we experience the truth of the proverb: "It is the blessing of Jehovah that makes one rich, and He adds no pain with it." (Prov. 10:22) No matter where we may live on this earth, we are in this land—the spiritual paradise—as long as we are actively supporting pure worship in word and in deed.

14 This spiritual land is precious to Jehovah. Why? In his eyes, its inhabitants are "the precious things of all the nations," individuals whom he has drawn to pure worship. (Hag. 2:7; John 6:44) They are earnestly endeavoring to put on a new personality, one that reflects God's own lofty qualities. (Eph. 4:23, 24; 5:1, 2) As pure worshippers, they offer themselves fully in his service, doing so in ways that glorify him and prove their love for him. (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 John 5:3) We can only imagine the joy that must fill Jehovah's heart as he sees his worshippers working hard to beautify the spiritual land. Just think: By giving pure worship priority in your life, you not only beautify the spiritual paradise but also make Jehovah's heart rejoice!—Prov. 27:11.

15, 16. When will Gog of Magog invade our restored spiritual land?

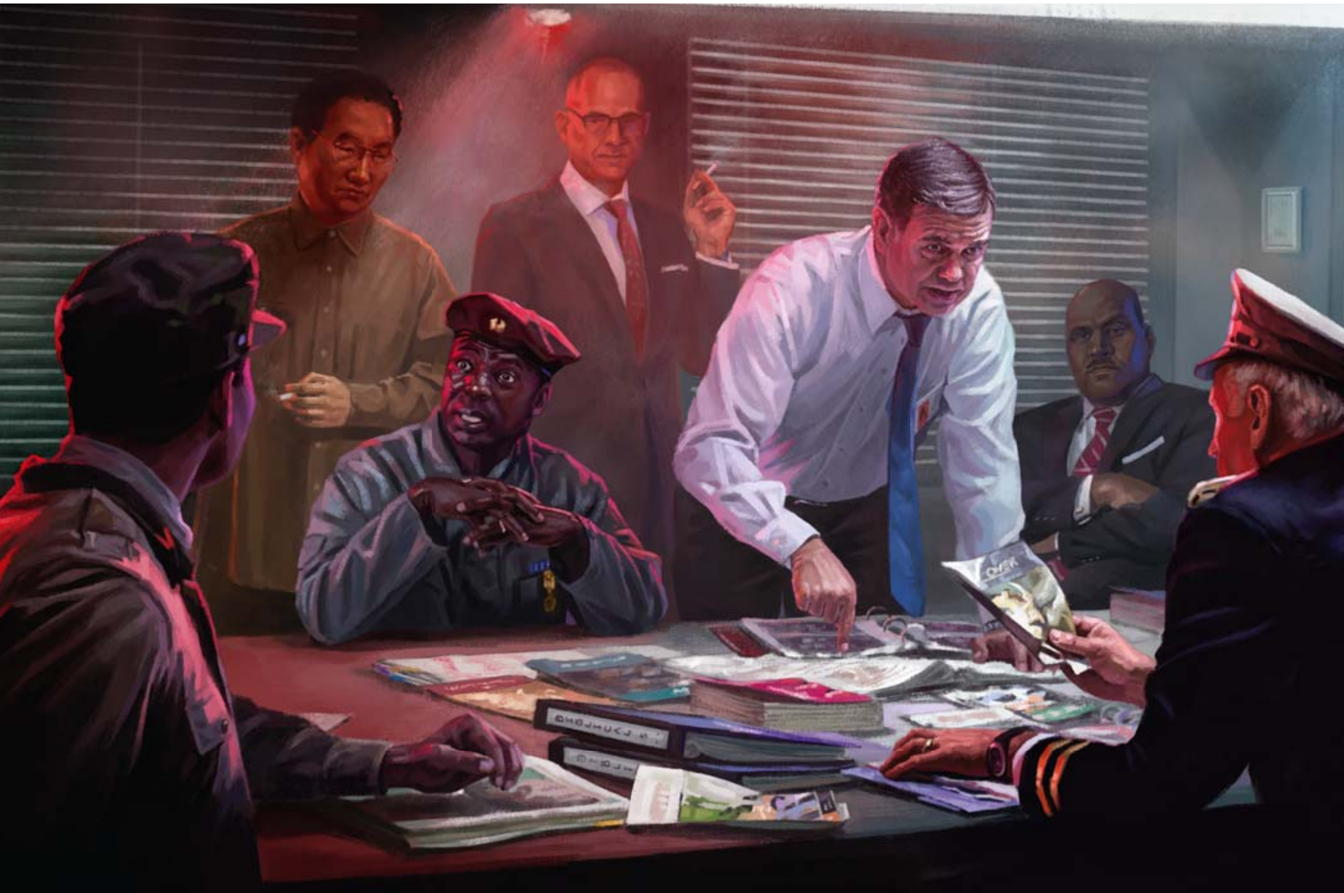
17, 18. How will Jehovah guide matters during the great tribulation?

The Land—When, Why, and How Will Gog Invade It?

15 It is sobering to think that soon a coalition of earthly nations will invade our precious spiritual land. Since this foretold attack will involve us as Jehovah's pure worshippers, we want to know more about it. Consider three questions that naturally arise.

16 ***When will Gog of Magog invade our restored spiritual land?*** The prophecy answers: "In the final part of the years you will invade the land." (Ezek. 38:8) This suggests a time close to the end of this system of things. Remember that the great tribulation will begin with the destruction of Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion. *After* false religious institutions have been destroyed and *before* Armageddon begins, Gog will launch a final, all-out attack on true worshippers.

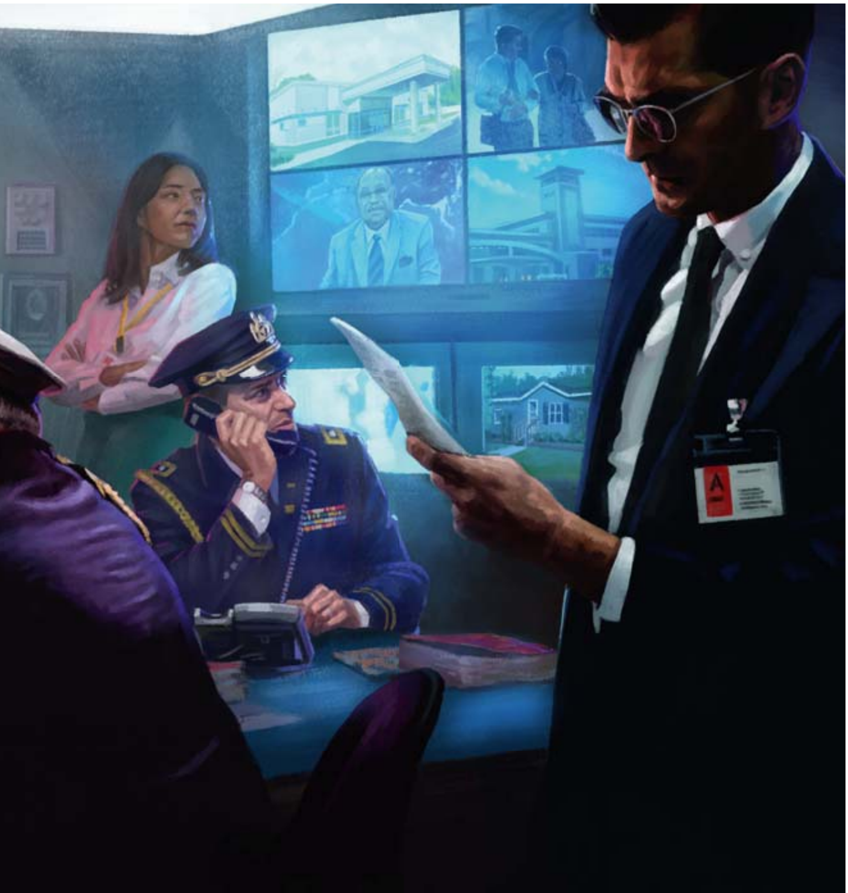
17 ***Why will Gog invade the restored land of Jehovah's pure worshippers?*** Ezekiel's prophecy reveals two factors—first, Jehovah's guiding hand and, second, Gog's evil motives.



19. What will motivate Gog to try to plunder pure worship?

18 *Jehovah's guiding hand.* **(Read Ezekiel 38:4, 16.)** Notice what Jehovah says to Gog: "I will . . . put hooks in your jaws" and, "I will bring you against my land." Do those words mean that Jehovah will force the nations to attack his own worshippers? Of course not! He would never cause evil to befall his people. (Job 34:12) But Jehovah knows his enemies—that they will hate pure worshippers and will not be able to resist an opportunity to try to wipe them out. (1 John 3:13) As if putting hooks in Gog's jaws and leading him along, Jehovah will guide matters so that events will unfold according to His will and timetable. At some point following the destruction of Babylon the Great, Jehovah may in some way lure the nations into carrying out what is already in their hearts. Jehovah will thus set the stage for the attack that leads to Armageddon, earth's greatest war. Then he will deliver his people, magnify his sovereignty, and sanctify his holy name.—Ezek. 38:23.

19 *Gog's evil motives.* The nations will "devise an evil plan." They will seek to vent their long-standing rage and hatred on



Gog will "devise an evil plan" in a futile attempt to wipe out pure worship

SEE PARAGRAPH 19

20. How will Gog invade the spiritual land, or paradise?

21. Why are you thankful that Jehovah has warned us about what is just ahead?

Jehovah's worshippers, who will seem vulnerable, as if "living in settlements unprotected by walls, bars, or gates." The nations will also be eager to "take much spoil and plunder" from those "who are accumulating wealth." (Ezek. 38:10-12) What "wealth"? Jehovah's people have great spiritual wealth; our most precious possession is our pure worship, which we give to Jehovah alone. The nations will seek to plunder pure worship, not because they value it, but because they hate it and all who promote it.

20 ***How will Gog invade the spiritual land, or paradise?*** The nations may try to disrupt our way of life and stop us from carrying out our worship. To that end, perhaps they will try to interrupt the flow of spiritual food, prevent us from meeting together, break up the unity we enjoy, and stop us from zealously proclaiming God's message. All of those are elements of the spiritual paradise. Egged on by Satan, the nations will try to efface true worshippers—and along with them pure worship—from the earth.

21 The coming attack by Gog of Magog will affect all true worshippers in the God-given spiritual land. How thankful we are that Jehovah has warned us about what is just ahead! Meanwhile, as we await the great tribulation, may we be determined to uphold pure worship, giving it priority in our lives. By so doing, we will contribute to the beauty of the restored land now. And we will put ourselves in line to witness something truly spectacular in the near future: How Jehovah will stand up for his people and his holy name at Armageddon, as the next chapter will explain.

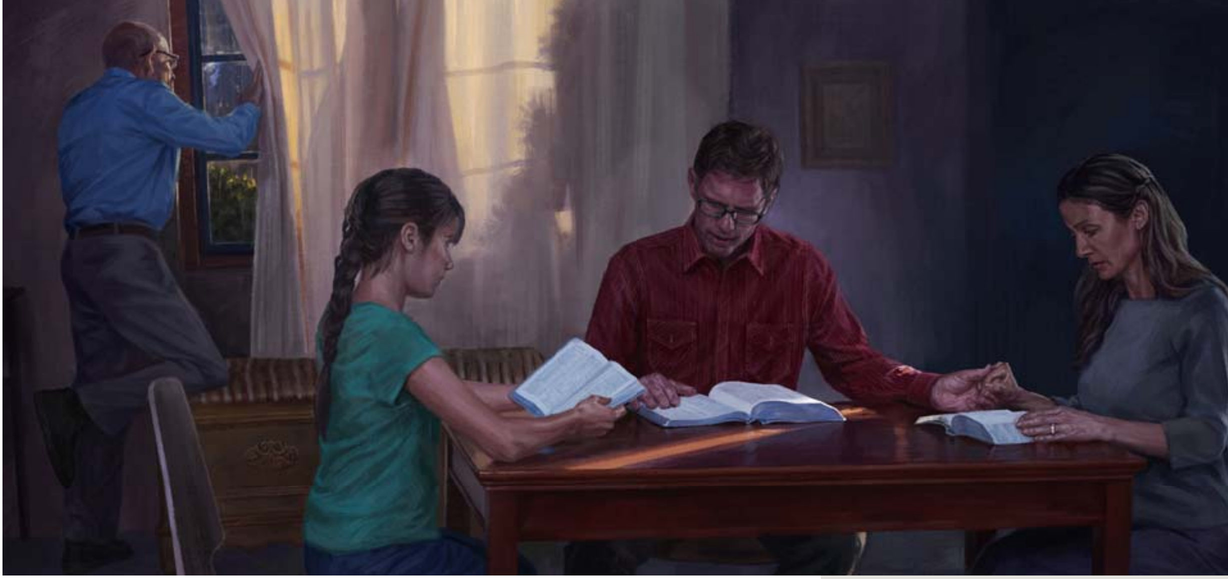
The nations will seek to plunder pure worship because they hate it and all who promote it

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 Explain the identity of Gog of Magog.

2 What is the spiritual land, and how can you beautify it?

3 While awaiting the great tribulation, what should we be determined to do, and why?



18

“MY GREAT RAGE WILL FLARE UP”

EZEKIEL 38:18

FOCUS: *Gog’s attack provokes Jehovah’s anger; Jehovah defends his people during the war of Armageddon*

1-3. (a) In what will Jehovah’s “great rage” result? (See opening picture.) (b) What will we now consider?

THE men, women, and children stand together, singing a Kingdom song. An elder then offers a heartfelt prayer, begging Jehovah for His protection. All in the congregation are confident that Jehovah will care for them, but they still need comfort and reassurance. Outside, the sounds of battle split the air. Armageddon has begun!—Rev. 16:14, 16.

2 During the war of Armageddon, Jehovah will execute people, not in a cold, clinical manner, but in a “great rage.” **(Read Ezekiel 38:18.)** He will direct the explosive force of his anger, not against one army or one nation, but against countless individuals living across the globe. On that day, those slain by Jehovah “will be from one end of the earth clear to the other end of the earth.”—Jer. 25:29, 33.

3 What causes Jehovah, the God of love, the one described as “merciful and compassionate” and “slow to anger,” to take such an action, flaring up in a “great rage”? (Ex. 34:6; 1 John 4:16) Let us see how the answer to that question can bring

4, 5. How is God's anger different from that of imperfect humans?

6. How does Jehovah react when his name is profaned?

7, 8. What lessons do we learn from Jehovah's dealings with Israel?

us great comfort, fill us with courage, and motivate us in our preaching work today.

What Provokes Jehovah's "Great Rage"?

4 We first need to recognize that Jehovah's anger is not like that of imperfect humans. When man's anger boils over into rage and spills over into action, the results are often uncontrolled and are seldom good. For example, Cain, the first son of Adam, became "hot with anger" because Jehovah rejected his sacrifice but approved of the gift offered by Abel. The outcome? Cain murdered his righteous brother. (Gen. 4:3-8; Heb. 11:4) Think, too, of David, described as a man agreeable to Jehovah's heart. (Acts 13:22) Even this good man almost committed a terrible crime when he heard that the rich landowner Nabal screamed insults at him and his men. Boiling with rage, David and his soldiers "strapped on their swords," intending to kill not only ungrateful Nabal but also every male in his household. Fortunately, Nabal's wife, Abigail, was able to convince David and his men not to take revenge. (1 Sam. 25:9-14, 32, 33) With good reason, Jehovah inspired James to write: "Man's anger does not bring about God's righteousness."—Jas. 1:20.

Jehovah's anger is always controlled and predictable

5 In contrast with man's temper, which is often misdirected, Jehovah's disposition is always controlled and predictable. Even when motivated by great rage, Jehovah acts righteously. When he fights an enemy, he never sweeps away "the righteous with the wicked." (Gen. 18:22-25) In addition, Jehovah's anger is ignited only for righteous reasons. Consider two reasons and the lessons we can learn from them.

6 *Reason: Jehovah's name is profaned.* Those who claim to represent Jehovah but who act wickedly damage his reputation and rightly provoke his anger. (Ezek. 36:23) As discussed in the preceding chapters of this publication, the nation of Israel brought great reproach on Jehovah's name. Understandably, the nation's attitudes and actions made Jehovah angry. But he never lost control of his rage—he punished his people only to the proper degree, never beyond it. (Jer. 30:11) And once Jehovah's anger accomplished its purpose, it ended with no residual resentment.—Ps. 103:9.

7 *Lessons:* Jehovah's dealings with the Israelites provide a sobering warning for us. Like the ancient Israelites, we have the privilege of bearing Jehovah's name. We are Jehovah's

Witnesses. (Isa. 43:10) Our speech and actions reflect directly on the God we represent. Never would we want to become brazen in doing wrong and bring reproach on Jehovah's name. Such a hypocritical course *will* spark Jehovah's anger, and sooner or later, he *will* act to protect his reputation. —Heb. 3:13, 15; 2 Pet. 2:1, 2.

8 Should the warning that Jehovah is capable of "great rage" prevent us from drawing close to him? No. We know that Jehovah is patient and forgiving. (Isa. 55:7; Rom. 2:4) But we also recognize that he is not weakly sentimental. In fact, we develop a healthy respect for him, knowing that his anger will blaze against those who become hardened in a course of sin and that he will not allow them to remain among his people. (1 Cor. 5:11-13) Jehovah has clearly told us what makes him angry. It is up to us to avoid the attitudes and actions that provoke him.—John 3:36; Rom. 1:26-32; Jas. 4:8.

9 *Reason: Jehovah's faithful people are threatened.* Jehovah is provoked to anger when enemies attack those who loyally seek shelter under his protective care. For example, after the Israelites left Egypt, Pharaoh and his mighty army descended on the seemingly helpless people huddled on the shore of the Red Sea. But when that powerful military force chased the Israelites across the dry seabed, Jehovah took the wheels off the war chariots and shook the Egyptians off into the sea. "Not so much as one among them was allowed to survive." (Ex. 14:25-28) Jehovah's anger blazed against the Egyptians because of his "loyal love" for his people.—**Read Exodus 15:9-13.**

10 Likewise, Jehovah's love for his people prompted him to act in the days of King Hezekiah. The Assyrians, the most powerful and brutal military force of the day, had marched on the city of Jerusalem. Jehovah's loyal servants were threatened with a siege that would lead to a slow, horrible death. (2 Ki. 18:27) In response, Jehovah sent just one angel; he killed 185,000 enemy soldiers in a single night! (2 Ki. 19:34, 35) Imagine the scene in the Assyrian camp the following morning. Spears, shields, and swords lie untouched. No trumpets wake the men. No orders rally the troops. An eerie silence hangs over still tents and an encampment strewn with corpses.

11 *Lessons:* Those examples of how Jehovah reacts when his people are threatened provide a graphic warning to our

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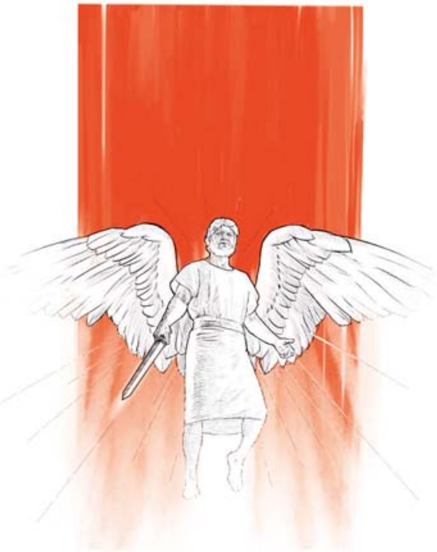
9, 10. How does Jehovah respond when his faithful people are threatened? Give examples.

11. What comfort and courage do we gain from Scriptural examples of how Jehovah reacts when his people are threatened?



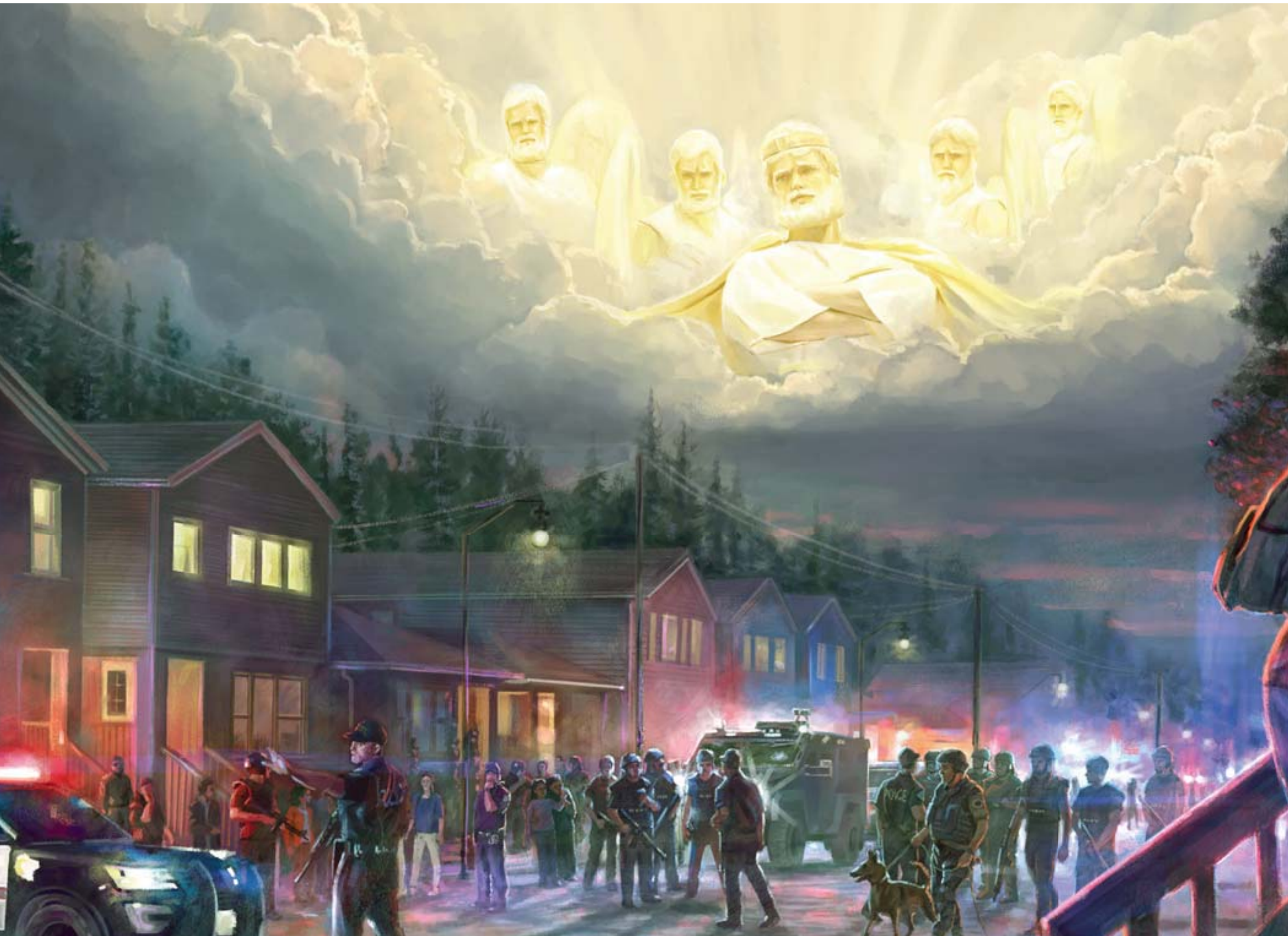
Just as an angel in the days of Hezekiah protected God's people from the Assyrians, angels will protect us

SEE PARAGRAPHS 10, 23

12. During the great tribulation, what will cause Jehovah's rage to flare up?

enemies: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" when his wrath is provoked. (Heb. 10:31) For us, those same examples bring comfort and foster courage. We gain comfort from knowing that our main enemy, Satan, will not succeed. Soon his "short period" of dominance will end! (Rev. 12:12) Until then, we can serve Jehovah with courage, confident that no individual, organization, or government can prevent us from doing God's will. **(Read Psalm 118: 6-9.)** The apostle Paul expressed our conviction with these inspired words: "If God is for us, who will be against us?" —Rom. 8:31.

12 During the coming great tribulation, Jehovah will act to protect us, just as he did the Israelites trapped by the Egyptians and the Jews in Jerusalem besieged by the Assyrians. When our enemies try to destroy us, Jehovah's deep love for us will cause his rage to flare up. Those who are foolish



enough to attack us will, in effect, be touching the pupil of Jehovah's eye. His response will be swift and decisive. (Zech. 2: 8, 9) The resulting carnage will be unprecedented. But God's enemies will have no valid cause to be surprised when Jehovah unleashes his wrath on them. Why not?

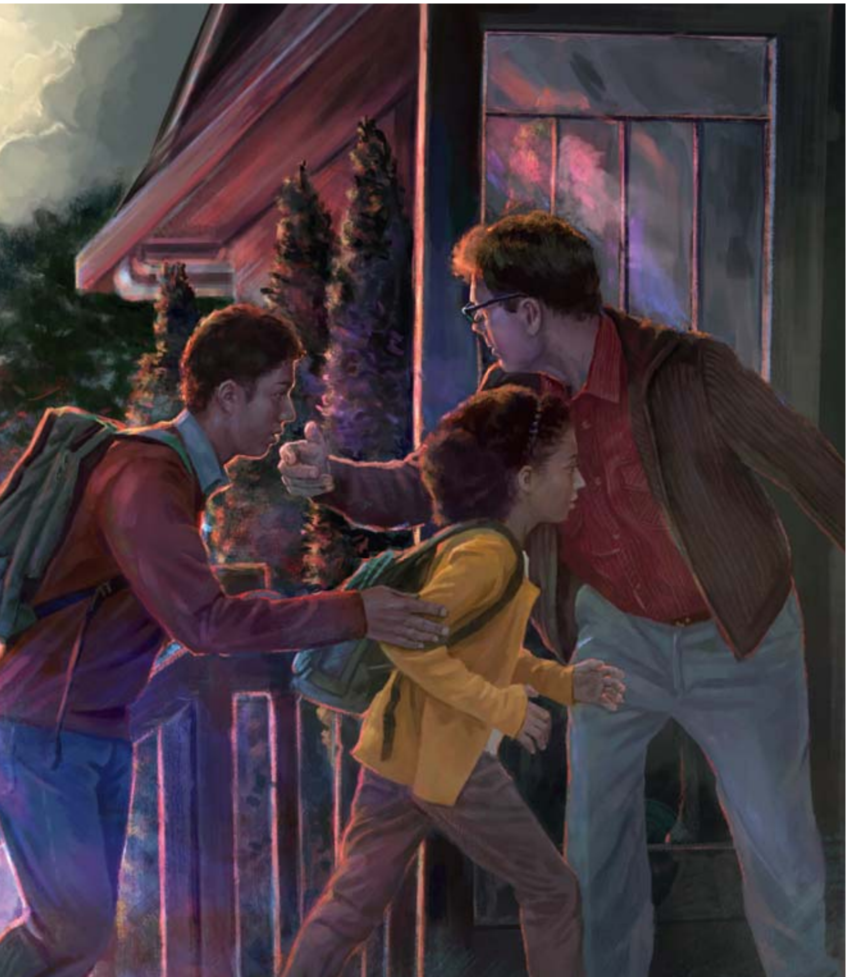
13. What warnings has Jehovah given?

14, 15. What work has Jehovah done, and why?

What Warnings Has Jehovah Given?

13 Jehovah is "slow to anger" and has given ample warnings that he will destroy those who oppose him and threaten his people. (Ex. 34:6, 7) Jehovah used such prophets as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Christ Jesus, and the apostles Peter, Paul, and John to warn of a great climactic battle.—See the box "Jehovah Warns of the Coming Great Battle."

14 Jehovah had these warnings recorded in his Word. He also ensured that the Bible would become the most widely translated and distributed book in history. Throughout the



When his people are threatened, Jehovah will use heavenly armies to unleash his wrath

SEE PARAGRAPH 21

18A

JEHOVAH WARNS OF THE COMING GREAT BATTLE

SEE PARAGRAPHS 13, 14

The Bible contains numerous prophecies that warn of a climactic battle in which Jehovah will wipe out all who oppose him and his people. Listed here are just some of those prophecies. Notice the similarities in these warnings, and note that Jehovah has ensured that all mankind has the opportunity to hear them and to act.

EZEKIEL:

"'I will call for a sword against [Gog] on all my mountains,' declares the Sovereign Lord Jehovah." —Ezek. 38:18-23.

DANIEL:

"The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will . . . crush and put an end to all these kingdoms." —Dan. 2:44.

JEREMIAH:

"[Jehovah] will personally pass judgment on all humans. And he will put the wicked to the sword."—Jer. 25:31-33.

DAYS OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

16, 17. Has Jehovah set a day for the final war? Explain.

earth, he has raised an army of volunteers who help others learn how to make peace with God and who warn of the coming "great day of Jehovah." (Zeph. 1:14; Ps. 2:10-12; 110:3) He has motivated his people to translate Bible study publications into hundreds of languages and to spend hundreds of millions of hours each year talking about the promises and the warnings found in his Word.

15 Jehovah has had all this work done "because he does not desire anyone to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance." (2 Pet. 3:9) What a privilege we have to represent our loving, patient God and to play a small part in spreading his message! Soon, however, time will run out for those who do not pay attention to the warnings.

When Will Jehovah's Anger "Flare Up"?

16 Jehovah has set a day for the final war. He knows in advance when the attack on his people will take place. (Matt. 24:36) How does Jehovah know when his enemies will attack?

JESUS:

"There will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning."—Matt. 24:21, 22.

PAUL:

"Jesus . . . with his powerful angels . . . brings vengeance on those who do not know God."—2 Thess. 1:6-9.

PETER:

"Jehovah's day will come as a thief, . . . and earth and the works in it will be exposed."—2 Pet. 3:10.

JOHN:

"Out of [Jesus'] mouth protrudes a sharp, long sword with which to strike the nations."—Rev. 19:11-18.

FIRST CENTURY C.E.

The Bible is the most widely translated and distributed book of all time

JEHOVAH'S MODERN-DAY SERVANTS . . .

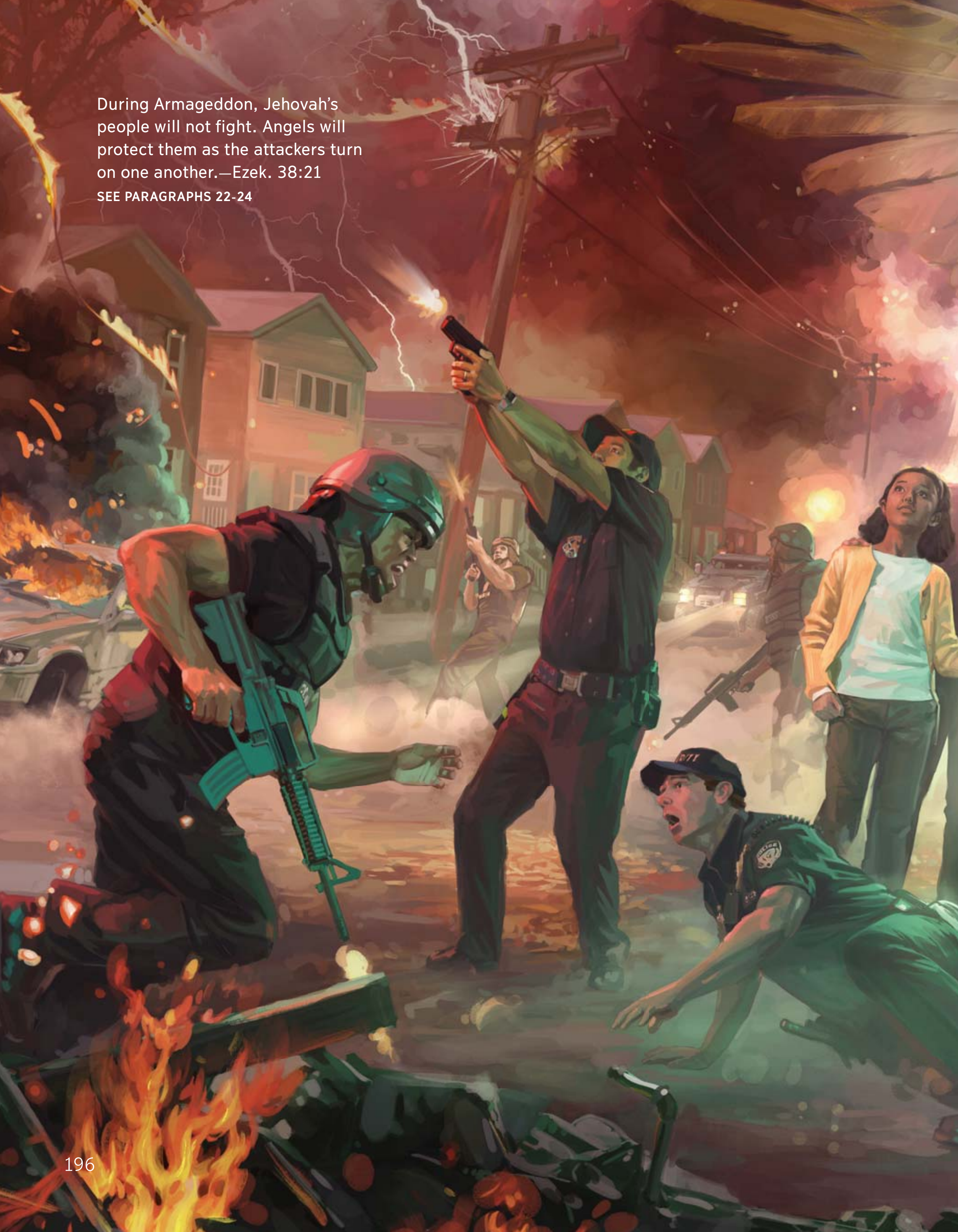
- Distribute billions of copies of Bible literature in hundreds of languages
- Spend hundreds of millions of hours each year preaching

MODERN TIMES

18. Why will humans pick a fight with the Almighty?

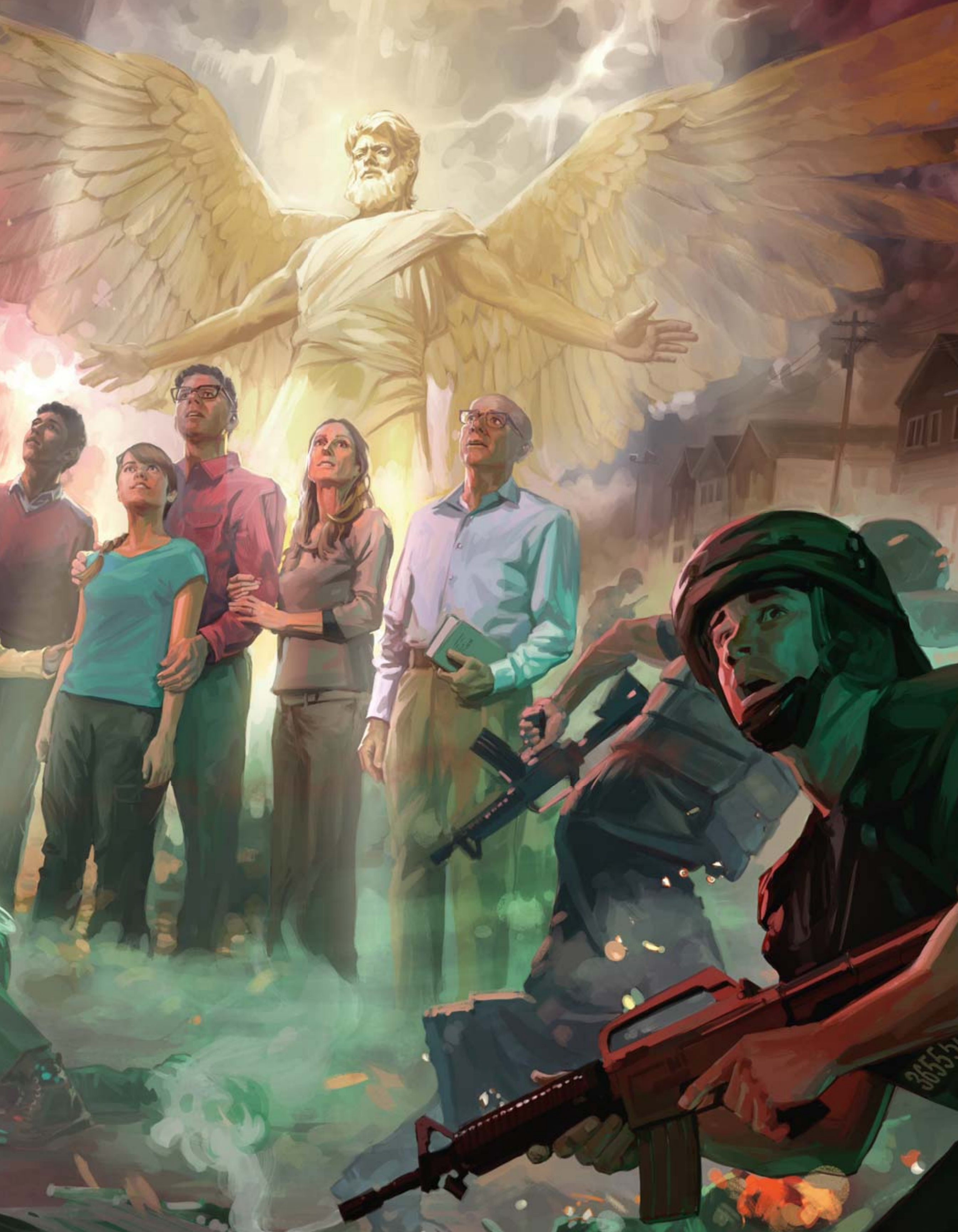
17 As we saw in the preceding chapter of this publication, Jehovah tells Gog: "I will . . . put hooks in your jaws." He will lead the nations into a decisive conflict. (Ezek. 38:4) This does not mean that Jehovah is the aggressor in this fight; nor does it mean that he takes away the free will of those who oppose him. Rather, it indicates that Jehovah can read hearts and knows how his enemies will respond to a given set of circumstances.—Ps. 94:11; Isa. 46:9, 10; Jer. 17:10.

18 If Jehovah does not start the conflict or force his opponents into battle, why will mere humans put themselves in a position where they will be fighting against the Almighty himself? One reason is that by this time in history, they will likely have convinced themselves either that God does not exist or that he will not intervene in human affairs. Perhaps they will think this way because they will have just wiped out all false religious organizations on earth. So they might reason that if God existed, surely he would defend the institutions



During Armageddon, Jehovah's people will not fight. Angels will protect them as the attackers turn on one another.—Ezek. 38:21

SEE PARAGRAPHS 22-24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19. What may well happen after false religion is devastated?

20, 21. Who is Gog, and what will happen to him?

22, 23. Who will protect God's people, and how will they no doubt feel about their task?

that claim to represent him. They will not realize that it was actually God who put the thought into their hearts to get rid of religions that have so grossly misrepresented him.—Rev. 17:16, 17.

19 Sometime after false religion is devastated, Jehovah may well have his people deliver a hard-hitting message, one that the book of Revelation likens to a hailstorm in which each hailstone weighs about 45 pounds. (Rev. 16:21, ftn.) This message, possibly a declaration that the political and commercial system is about to end, torments the hearers to such a degree that they blaspheme God. Likely it is this message that provokes the nations into making an all-out assault on God's people, to silence us once and for all. They will think that we are defenseless, an easy target to destroy. What a mistake that will be!

How Will Jehovah Express His Rage?

20 As we saw in Chapter 17 of this publication, Ezekiel uses a prophetic title, "Gog of the land of Magog," to identify the coalition of nations that attack us. (Ezek. 38:2) But the members of this coalition will be tethered to one another only by a thread. Beneath a veneer of cooperation, the spirit of rivalry, pride, and nationalistic ambition will continue to exist. It will be an easy thing for Jehovah to turn the sword of each one "against his own brother." (Ezek. 38:21) But the nations' destruction will not be a man-made calamity.

What should our knowledge of Jehovah's day motivate us to do?

21 Before they are destroyed, our enemies will see the sign of the Son of man, likely a supernatural manifestation of the power of Jehovah and Jesus. The opposers will see things that cause them extreme anxiety. As Jesus foretold, "people will become faint out of fear and expectation of the things coming upon the inhabited earth." (Luke 21:25-27) To their horror, they will realize that they miscalculated when they attacked Jehovah's people. They will be forced to know the Creator in his role as military commander, Jehovah of armies. (Ps. 46:6-11; Ezek. 38:23) Jehovah will no doubt unleash heavenly armies and natural forces in such a way that he protects his loyal servants but eliminates his enemies.—**Read 2 Peter 2:9.**

22 Think of how keen Jesus will be to lead the charge against God's enemies and to protect those who love and serve his Father. Think, too, of the emotions that the anointed will then feel. At some point before Armageddon begins,

the last of them remaining on earth will be raised to heavenly life so that all of the 144,000 can accompany Jesus into battle. (Rev. 17:12-14) Many of the anointed will no doubt have developed close personal friendships with members of the other sheep as they worked together during the last days. Now the anointed will have both the authority and the power to defend those who supported them so loyally during their trials.—Matt. 25:31-40.

23 Angels will also be part of Jesus' heavenly army. (2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 19:14) They already helped him remove Satan and the demons from heaven. (Rev. 12:7-9) And they have been involved in gathering those on earth who want to worship Jehovah. (Rev. 14:6, 7) How appropriate it is that Jehovah will allow the angels to protect these loyal ones! Most important, all in Jehovah's army will feel honored to sanctify and vindicate his name, or reputation, by helping to destroy his enemies.—Matt. 6:9, 10.

24 With such a powerful, highly motivated army protecting them, those of the great crowd of other sheep will have no reason to cringe in fear. In fact, they will "stand up straight and lift up [their] heads, because [their] deliverance is getting near." (Luke 21:28) How important that before Jehovah's day comes, we help as many as possible to come to know and love our merciful, protective Father!—**Read Zephaniah 2:2, 3.**

25 The aftermath of human wars is chaos and misery. By contrast, the outcome of Armageddon will be order and happiness. What will it be like when Jehovah's rage is spent, his warriors' swords are sheathed, and the last echoes of the great battle fade? In the next chapter, we will consider that wonderful future.

24. How will the great crowd of other sheep react?

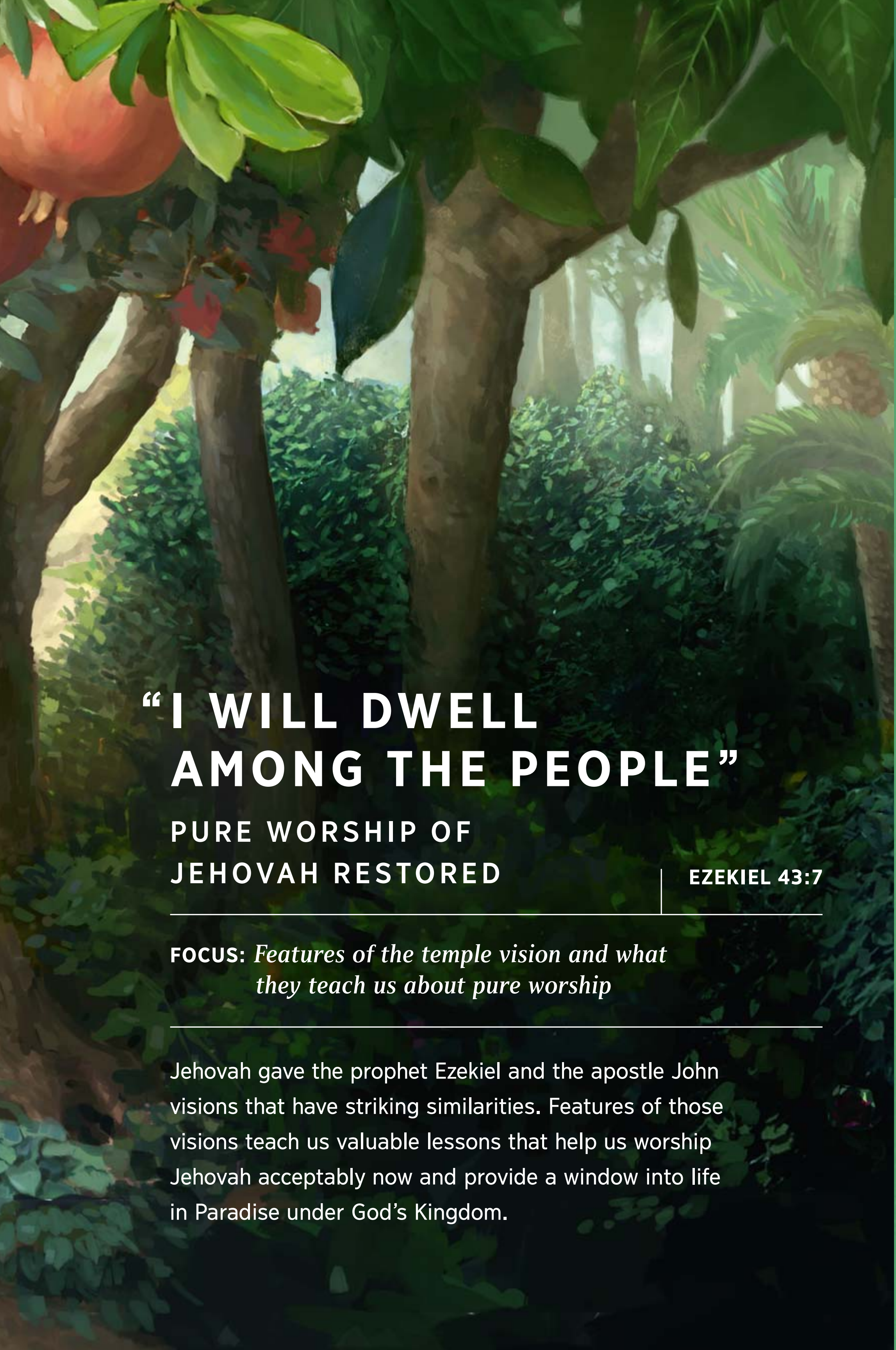
25. What will we consider next?

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 What provokes Jehovah's anger?

2 How will Jehovah express his rage?

3 Why should we courageously promote pure worship now?



5

SECTION FIVE

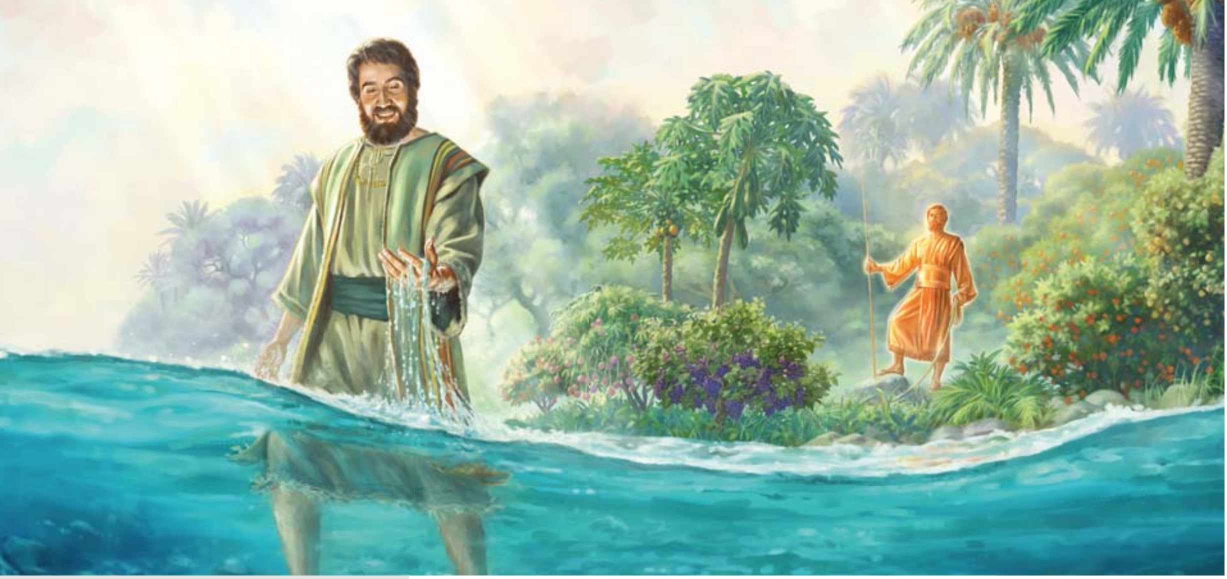
“I WILL DWELL AMONG THE PEOPLE”

PURE WORSHIP OF JEHOVAH RESTORED

EZEKIEL 43:7

FOCUS: *Features of the temple vision and what they teach us about pure worship*

Jehovah gave the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John visions that have striking similarities. Features of those visions teach us valuable lessons that help us worship Jehovah acceptably now and provide a window into life in Paradise under God’s Kingdom.



19

“EVERYTHING WILL LIVE WHEREVER THE STREAM GOES”

EZEKIEL 47:9

FOCUS: *How the vision of a river flowing from the temple finds fulfillment in ancient times, at present, and in the future*

1, 2. According to Ezekiel 47:1-12, what does Ezekiel see and learn? (See opening picture.)

EZEKIEL sees yet another marvel in his temple vision: There is a stream flowing from the sacred structure! Just picture him tracing the course of that crystal-clear water. **(Read Ezekiel 47:1-12.)** It trickles out from the threshold of the sanctuary; then it emerges from the temple complex near the eastern gate. Ezekiel’s angelic guide leads him away from the temple, measuring the distance as they go. The angel repeatedly has Ezekiel pass through the water, and the prophet finds that it deepens rapidly, soon becoming a torrent that he could cross only if he were to plunge in and swim!

2 Ezekiel learns that the river flows into the Dead Sea and heals its salty, lifeless waters wherever the water of the river comes in contact with them, making the waters teem with fish. And along the riverbanks, he sees many trees of all sorts growing. Each month, they produce a new crop of nourishing fruit, and they sprout leaves that provide healing. Seeing all of this must have filled Ezekiel's heart with peace and hope. But what did this part of the temple vision mean for him and his fellow exiles? And what does it mean for us today?

What Did the Visionary River Mean for the Exiles?

3 The Jews of ancient times surely did not understand the visionary river to be literal. Rather, this passage of Scripture likely reminded them of another inspired restoration prophecy, one recorded perhaps more than two centuries earlier by the prophet Joel. **(Read Joel 3:18.)** When the Jewish exiles read Joel's inspired words, they did not expect the mountains literally to "drip with sweet wine" or the hills to "flow with milk"; nor did they expect a spring to flow "out of the house of Jehovah." Similarly, fellow Jews likely understood that the message of the prophet Ezekiel's vision was not about a literal river.[1] So, what message was Jehovah conveying? The Scriptures offer strong indications about the meaning of some parts of this picture. In general, though, we will consider three clear, loving assurances that may be drawn from this prophetic passage.

4 *A river of blessings.* In the Bible, rivers and water are often used to picture the flow of Jehovah's life-giving blessings. Ezekiel saw such a river flowing from the temple, so the vision would have led God's people to expect that Jehovah's life-giving spiritual blessings would flow to them as long as they adhered to pure worship. What blessings? They would again receive spiritual instruction from the priests. And with sacrifices being offered at the temple, they could once more rest assured that atonement would be made for their sins. (Ezek. 44:15, 23; 45:17) Thus, they would be clean again, as if washed in the pure water emanating from the temple.

5 Would there always be enough blessings for all? The vision soothes any such concerns by showing the miraculous expansion of the waters—increasing from a trickle to a torrent in just over a mile! (Ezek. 47:3-5) The population in the Jews' restored homeland might grow in number; yet, Jehovah's blessings would expand to meet their needs. The river was a picture of abundance and plenty!

6 *Life-giving water.* In Ezekiel's vision, the river flowed into the Dead Sea, reviving much of it. Notice that the waters gave life to such swarms of fish that the variety was comparable to that found in the Great Sea, or the Mediterranean Sea. There was even a fishing industry thriving along the

3. Why did the Jews of ancient times not understand Ezekiel's vision of a river to be literal?

4. (a) The river in Ezekiel's vision would have led the Jews to expect what blessings from Jehovah? (b) How does the Bible's use of the terms "river" and "water" assure us that Jehovah will bless his people? (See the box "Rivers of Blessings From Jehovah.")

5. How did the visionary river soothe any concerns about whether there would always be enough blessings for all?

6. (a) The prophetic picture conveyed what reassuring promise? (b) What warning note did the vision also sound? (See footnote.)

FOOTNOTE

[1] Additionally, those exiled Jews who remembered the topography of their homeland likely knew that this river could not be a literal one, for it began flowing from the temple on a very high mountain that did not even exist in the location described. Further, the vision may imply that the river flowed in a direct and unobstructed course to the Dead Sea, another geographic impossibility.

RIVERS OF BLESSINGS FROM JEHOVAH

SEE PARAGRAPH 3

Consider some different Bible passages that use the terms "river" and "water" to picture blessings that flow from Jehovah. Taken together, they say something very encouraging about the means by which Jehovah blesses us. How so?

JOEL 3:18 This prophecy shows a spring emanating from the temple sanctuary. It flows out to irrigate the dry "Valley of the Acacia Trees." So both Joel and Ezekiel see a river bringing life to a barren place. In both cases, the river comes from Jehovah's house, or temple.

ZECHARIAH 14:8 The prophet Zechariah sees "living waters" flowing from the city of Jerusalem. Half of the water runs to the eastern sea, or Dead Sea, and half, to the western sea, or Mediterranean Sea. Jerusalem was "the city of the great King," Jehovah God. (Matt. 5:35) Zechariah's mention of that city thus reminds us of Jehovah's rulership over the whole earth in times to come. We have long understood that the waters in this prophecy suggest that Jehovah will bless two groups of faithful humans in Paradise, those who live through the great tribulation and those who are resurrected afterward.

REVELATION 22:1, 2 The apostle John sees a symbolic river much like the one that Ezekiel saw. However, it emanates, not from a temple, but from Jehovah's throne. So this vision, like that of Zechariah, seems to stress the blessings of divine rulership during the Millennium.

Of course, there is only a subtle distinction between the blessings that come from Jehovah's rulership and those that are represented by the river that Ezekiel saw in vision. All such blessings come from Jehovah and flow to all faithful people.

PSALM 46:4 Note how this one verse seems to embrace both aspects—worship and rulership. Here we see a river that brings rejoicing to "the city of God," suggesting the Kingdom and rulership, as well as to "the holy grand tabernacle of the Most High," suggesting pure worship.

Taken as a whole, these passages assure us that Jehovah will bless faithful mankind in two ways. We will benefit eternally, first, from his rulership and, second, from his arrangement for pure worship. So let us be determined now to keep seeking from Jehovah God and his Son "living water"—their loving provisions for everlasting life!—Jer. 2:13; John 4:10.

shore of the Dead Sea between two towns that evidently lay a considerable distance apart. The angel stated: "Everything will live wherever the stream goes." Does that mean, though, that the water from Jehovah's house reached every part of the Dead Sea? No. The angel explained that some marshy regions remained beyond the reach of the life-giving waters. Those places were "abandoned to salt."[2] (Ezek. 47:8-11) So the prophetic picture conveyed a reassuring promise that pure worship would revive the people, causing them to thrive. But a warning note was also sounded: Not all would accept Jehovah's blessings; nor would all be healed.

7 *Trees for food and healing.* What of those trees along the riverbanks? They add to the beauty of the picture, do they not? They also add to its meaning. Ezekiel and his countrymen surely enjoyed thinking of the delicious fruit that such trees would provide, a new crop every month! That appealing picture further reassured them that Jehovah would feed them spiritually. And what else? Note that the leaves of those trees "will serve . . . for healing." (Ezek. 47:12) Jehovah knew that, above all, the returning exiles would need spiritual healing, and he promised to provide just that. How he did so was discussed in other restoration prophecies, as we have noted in Chapter 9 of this publication.

8 However, as we also discussed in Chapter 9, the returning exiles experienced only a limited fulfillment of such prophecies. It was the people themselves who limited that fulfillment. How could Jehovah bless them fully when backsliding, disobedience, and neglect of pure worship so often prevailed among them? Faithful ones were pained and disappointed by the conduct of their fellow Jews. However, loyal worshippers of Jehovah knew that his promises never fail; they always come true. **(Read Joshua 23:14.)** Hence, one day Ezekiel's vision would have a greater fulfillment. But when?

The River Flows Today!

9 As we noted in Chapter 14 of this publication, Ezekiel's temple vision has a greater fulfillment during "the final part of the days," the time when pure worship is exalted as never before. (Isa. 2:2) In what sense is this part of Ezekiel's vision being fulfilled right now?

10 *A river of blessings.* The water flowing from Jehovah's house reminds us of what blessings today? Really, we are

7. The presence of the visionary trees along the riverbanks gave the exiled Jews what reassurance?

8. What shows that Ezekiel's vision would have a greater fulfillment?

9. When does Ezekiel's temple vision have a greater fulfillment?

10, 11. (a) What blessings flow to us like a river today? (b) How has the flow of blessings from Jehovah expanded to meet growing needs during the last days?

FOOTNOTE

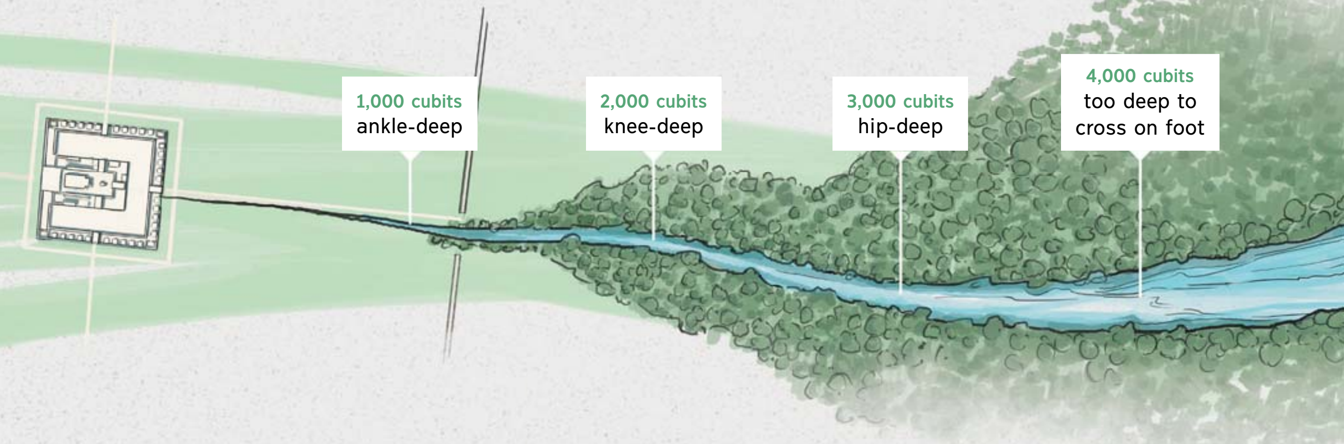
[2] Some commentators view this as a positive expression, noting that harvesting salt for use as a preservative has long been a profitable industry in the Dead Sea region. Note, though, that the account pointedly says that those marshy waters "will not be healed." They remain lifeless, unhealed, because the life-giving water from Jehovah's house does not reach them. So it seems that, in this instance, the saltiness of those marshes is meant in a negative sense.—Ps. 107:33, 34; Jer. 17:6.

19B

A TRICKLE BECOMES A TORRENT!

SEE PARAGRAPHS 4-21

Ezekiel follows a stream as it trickles from Jehovah's sanctuary and miraculously becomes a deep torrent in just over a mile! Along the riverbanks, he sees luxuriant trees that offer nourishment and healing. What does it all mean?



	The River Brings Blessings	Life-Giving Water	Trees for Food and Healing
ANCIENT	Once the exiles returned to their homeland, blessings flowed to them as they took part in the restoration of pure worship at the temple	Jehovah richly blessed his obedient people, even as their numbers increased, making them thrive spiritually	In a spiritual sense, Jehovah fed his faithful people in their restored land; he also healed them of the spiritual sickness that had long plagued them
MODERN	In 1919 pure worship was restored, opening the way for an unprecedented flow of spiritual blessings to God's faithful servants	In the developing spiritual paradise, ever-growing numbers have benefited from the expanding flow of Jehovah's spiritual blessings and have come to life in a spiritual sense	Ample supplies of spiritual food are helping people to counteract the pervasive spiritual sickness and starvation of today's world
FUTURE	After Armageddon, the flow of blessings from Jehovah will be physical as well as spiritual in nature	Armageddon survivors will be joined by untold millions of resurrected ones, and Jehovah's blessings will be abundant for all	Christ and his 144,000 corulers will help all obedient mankind to reach perfection and to enjoy health and vitality forever!

reminded of all that contributes to our spiritual health and nourishment. Foremost is the cleansing power of Christ's ransom sacrifice, which makes the forgiveness of our sins possible. The pure truths of God's Word are also likened to life-giving, cleansing water. (Eph. 5:25-27) How have such blessings flowed in our time?

11 In 1919 there were only a few thousand servants of Jehovah, and they were thrilled to receive the spiritual food they needed. In the decades that followed, their ranks kept swelling. Today, God's people number well over eight million. Has the flow of the pure waters of truth kept pace? Yes! We have an almost overwhelming supply of spiritual truths. Literally billions of Bibles, books, magazines, brochures, and tracts have flowed out to God's people in the past century. Like the visionary river that Ezekiel saw, the flow of pure truths has expanded rapidly to meet the growing needs of spiritually thirsty people worldwide. Bible-based publications have long been available in printed form. And now, by means of the website jw.org, such material is available electronically in over 900 languages! How do such waters of truth affect righthearted people?

12 *Life-giving water.* Ezekiel was told: "Everything will live wherever the stream goes." Think of the way the message of the truth has flowed to all those who have come into our restored spiritual land. Bible truths have brought life and spiritual health to millions of receptive hearts. However, the vision also conveys a timely warning: Not all remain receptive to such truth. Like the marshy and swampy places in the Dead Sea in Ezekiel's vision, there are hearts that become unreceptive, refusing to accept and apply the truth.[3] May that never be true of us!—**Read Deuteronomy 10:16-18.**

13 *Trees for food and healing.* Do the visionary trees along the riverbanks convey encouraging lessons to us today? Certainly! Remember, those trees produced a new crop of delicious fruit every month, and their leaves provided healing. (Ezek. 47:12) They thus remind us that we serve the God who generously feeds us and heals us in the most important way, spiritually. Today's world is sick and starving in a spiritual sense. By contrast, think of what Jehovah provides. Have you ever come to the end of an article in one of our journals, sung the concluding song at an assembly or a convention, or finished watching a video or broadcast program and

12. (a) How have we seen the message of the truth bring spiritual life and health to people? (b) What timely warning does the vision convey to us today? (See also footnote.)

13. What lessons may we today draw from those visionary trees?

FOOTNOTE

[3] In a similar vein, consider Jesus' illustration of the dragnet. Many fish are caught in the net, but not all prove to be "fine." The unsuitable ones need to be thrown away. Jesus thus warned that a sizable number of those who come into Jehovah's organization may, in time, prove to be unfaithful.—Matt. 13:47-50; 2 Tim. 2:20, 21.

14, 15. (a) What lesson should we take from the unhealed marshy places in Ezekiel's vision? (b) How does Ezekiel's visionary river benefit us today?

16, 17. (a) In what way will the water of life be even more expansive in Paradise? (b) How will we benefit from that river of blessings in Paradise?

felt blessed to have such spiritual food? We are truly well-fed. (Isa. 65:13, 14) Does our spiritual food promote spiritual health? The wholesome counsel we receive, based solidly on God's Word, helps us to fight off such spiritual enemies as immorality, greed, and lack of faith. Jehovah has also put in place an arrangement to help Christians overcome spiritual sickness brought on by serious sin. **(Read James 5:14.)** We are indeed blessed, just as suggested by Ezekiel's vision of the trees.

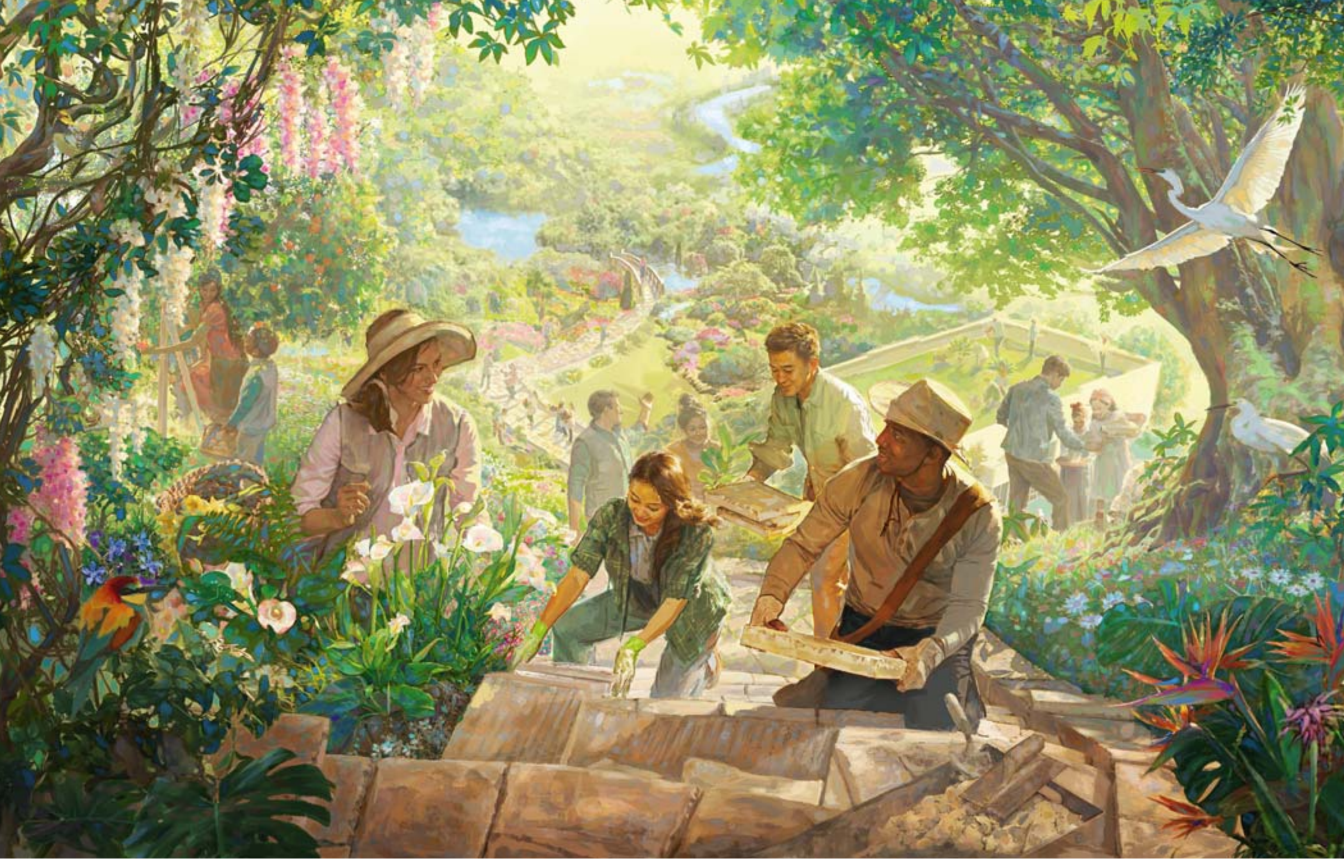
14 At the same time, we may take a lesson from those unhealed marshy places. Never would we want to refuse to let Jehovah's blessings flow into our life. It would be tragic to remain unhealed, like so many in this sick world. (Matt. 13:15) Rather, we are delighted to benefit from the river of blessings. When we eagerly drink in the pure waters of truth from God's Word, when we share such truths with others by means of the preaching work, when we receive loving guidance, comfort, and help from elders who have been trained by the faithful slave, we may think of Ezekiel's visionary river. That river promotes life and healing wherever it goes!

15 What, though, about a future fulfillment of this visionary river? As we will see, the river will flow in the greatest possible sense in the Paradise to come.

What the Vision Will Mean in Paradise

16 Do you picture yourself in Paradise, surrounded by friends and family, enjoying life to the full? Studying Ezekiel's visionary river can help you to make that picture more vivid. How so? Consider once more the three clear, loving aspects of the vision.

17 *A river of blessings*. The symbolic river will, in a sense, be far more expansive in Paradise, for its benefits will be not only spiritual but also physical. During Jesus' Thousand Year Reign, God's Kingdom will help faithful ones to benefit from the ransom in a much greater way. Gradually, they will be lifted to perfection! No more diseases, doctors, nurses, hospitals, health insurance! That water of life will flow to the millions of Armageddon survivors, "a great crowd" who will emerge from "the great tribulation." (Rev. 7:9, 14) However, that initial flow of the river of blessings, impressive though it will be, will be only a trickle compared to what will come later. As in Ezekiel's vision, the river will expand to meet greater needs.



In Paradise, the river of blessings will make everyone young and healthy

SEE PARAGRAPH 17

18 *Life-giving water.* During the Millennium, the "river of water of life" will become a torrent. (Rev. 22:1) Countless millions, even billions, will be resurrected from the dead and offered the opportunity to live forever in Paradise! Jehovah's blessings through the Kingdom will include bringing life to vast numbers of the dead, humans who have long lain powerless in the dust of the earth. (Isa. 26:19) However, will all those resurrected ones remain alive forever?

19 Each one must choose. You see, new scrolls will be opened during that time. So the refreshing waters from Jehovah will include newly revealed truths, new spiritual instructions. Is it not thrilling to think of that prospect? Nonetheless, some will refuse that blessing, choosing instead to disobey Jehovah. Some individuals may rebel during the Millennium, but they will not be allowed to disrupt Paradise. (Isa. 65:20) We may be reminded of Ezekiel's vision and think of those marshy places that remained barren, "abandoned to salt." How foolish are those who stubbornly refuse to drink from the precious water of life! After the Millennium, a group

18. In what sense will the "river of water of life" become a mighty torrent during the Millennium?

19. (a) What indicates that new waters of divine truth will be made available in Paradise? (b) In what sense will some be "abandoned to salt" in the future?

20. What arrangement for our benefit during the Millennium reminds us of the trees that Ezekiel saw?

21. How does contemplating Ezekiel's visionary river affect you, and what will we consider next? (See the box "A Trickle Becomes a Torrent!")

of rebels will side with Satan. All who reject Jehovah's righteous rule will face the same end: eternal death.—Rev. 20: 7-12.

20 *Trees for food and healing.* Jehovah does not want any of us to lose out on eternal life. To help us take hold of the marvelous opportunity he is offering, he will again make sure that there will be an arrangement like those trees that Ezekiel saw. In Paradise, though, the benefits from Jehovah will be physical as well as spiritual. In heaven, Jesus Christ and his 144,000 corulers with him will rule as kings for the Millennium. As a priestly class, the 144,000 will administer the benefits of Christ's ransom sacrifice, helping to lift faithful humans to perfection. (Rev. 20:6) This arrangement for physical and spiritual healing reminds us of those trees that Ezekiel saw along the riverbanks, trees that bear nourishing fruit and have leaves that heal. Ezekiel's vision parallels another beautiful prophetic passage, as recorded by the apostle John. **(Read Revelation 22:1, 2.)** The leaves of the trees John saw are "for the healing of the nations." Countless millions of faithful humans will benefit from the priestly services of the 144,000.

21 As you contemplate Ezekiel's visionary river, is your heart not filled with peace and hope? What marvelous times lie ahead of us! And just think—Jehovah painted striking word pictures of that time thousands of years ago, patiently inviting us to be there to see the great fulfillment, the reality promised in the pictures. Will you be there? You might wonder if there will really be a place for you in Paradise. Let us consider next how the closing passages of Ezekiel's prophecy give us reassurance.

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 How was Ezekiel's vision of the river fulfilled in ancient times?

2 In what ways are we seeing a fulfillment of that vision today?

3 How will Ezekiel's visionary river flow in the greatest sense during Christ's Millennial Reign?

20

“ALLOT THE LAND AS AN INHERITANCE”

EZEKIEL 45:1

FOCUS: *The meaning of the division of the land*

EZEKIEL has just seen a vision that must have made his thoughts travel back nearly 900 years to the days of Moses and Joshua. At that time, Jehovah outlined to Moses the boundaries of the Promised Land and later told Joshua how that land should be allotted among the tribes of Israel. (Num. 34:1-15; Josh. 13:7; 22:4, 9) But now, in the year 593 B.C.E., Jehovah instructs Ezekiel and his fellow exiles to allot the Promised Land among the tribes of Israel again!—Ezek. 45:1; 47:14; 48:29.

2 What message did this vision contain for Ezekiel and his fellow exiles? Why is this vision a source of encouragement for God’s people today? Will it see a larger fulfillment in the future?

A Vision With a Four-Fold Assurance

3 The final vision that Ezekiel received fills nine chapters of his book. (Ezek. 40:1–48:35) It provided the exiles with

1, 2. (a) What instructions does Ezekiel receive from Jehovah? (b) What questions will we consider?

3, 4. (a) Ezekiel’s final vision provided the exiles with what four assurances? (b) In this chapter, what guarantee will we examine?

THE ALLOTMENT OF THE LAND

SEE PARAGRAPHS 5-11

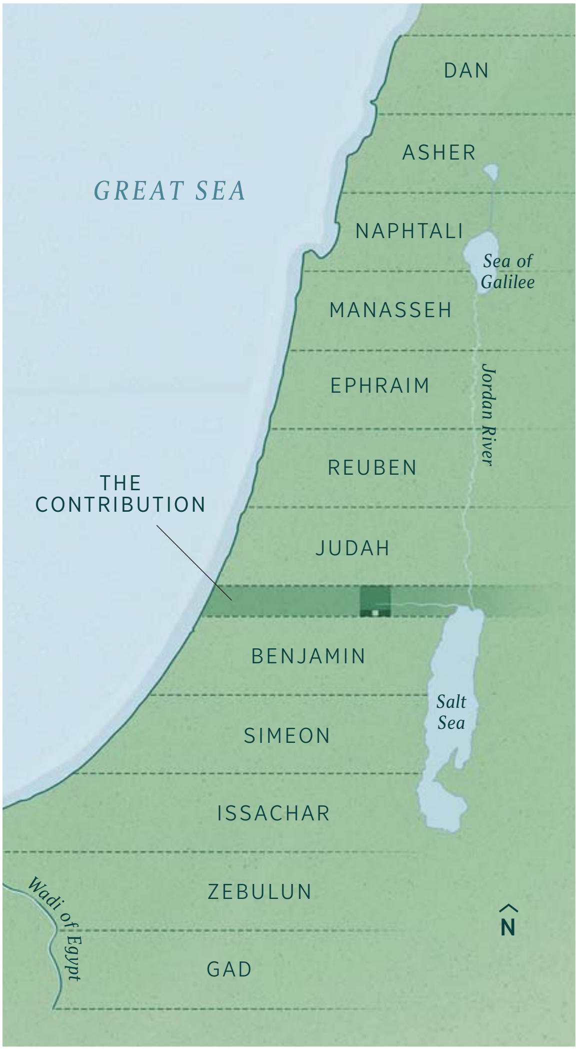
The description of the precisely measured boundaries reassured the exiles that their beloved land would definitely be restored. What lessons can we today draw from this vision? Consider two aspects of the vision:

A secure place and a valuable assignment

Each individual among the returned exiles would have an inheritance in the restored Promised Land. Similarly today, the spiritual paradise has a place for all of Jehovah's servants. No matter how modest our role in the organization may be, we have a secure place and a valuable assignment in the spiritual land. To Jehovah, all his servants are equally precious.

Equal allotments

In Ezekiel's vision, each territory in the restored Promised Land provided its inhabitants equal access to the bounty of the land. Similarly today, Jehovah has given all his servants equal access to the blessings of the spiritual paradise.


DAN
ASHER
GREAT SEA
NAPHTALI
Sea of Galilee
MANASSEH
EPHRAIM
Jordan River
REUBEN
THE CONTRIBUTION
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BENJAMIN
Salt Sea
SIMEON
ISSACHAR
ZEBULUN
Wadi of Egypt
N
GAD

four heartening assurances about the renewed nation of Israel. What were those assurances? First, pure worship would be restored in God's temple. Second, righteous priests and shepherds would lead the restored nation. Third, land inheritances would be reserved for all those who would return to Israel. And fourth, Jehovah would be with them, dwelling among them again.

4 Chapters 13 and 14 of this publication considered how the first two guarantees—the restoration of true worship and the leadership by righteous shepherds—would come true. In this chapter, we will focus on the third guarantee, the promise about the inheritance of the land. In the following chapter, we will consider the promise regarding the presence of Jehovah.—Ezek. 47:13-21; 48:1-7, 23-29.

"This Land . . . Is Assigned to You as an Inheritance"

5 **Read Ezekiel 47:14.** In vision, Jehovah directed Ezekiel's attention to a portion of land that would soon resemble "the garden of Eden." (Ezek. 36:35) Then Jehovah stated: "This is the territory that you will assign as the land inheritance of the 12 tribes of Israel." (Ezek. 47:13) "The territory" to be assigned was the restored land of Israel to which the exiles would return. Next, as recorded at Ezekiel 47:15-21, Jehovah went on to describe in detail the precise external boundaries of the whole land.

6 What was the purpose of this vision of land assignment? The description of the precisely measured boundaries reassured Ezekiel and his fellow exiles that their beloved land would definitely be restored. Imagine how that reassurance from Jehovah, in such detailed and descriptive language, must have lifted the hearts of the exiles! Did God's ancient people indeed receive land that was allotted to them as an inheritance? Yes, they did.

7 In 537 B.C.E., some 56 years after Ezekiel received his vision, thousands of exiles began to return to the land of Israel and take possession of it. Those remarkable events of long ago remind us of a similar development that has been taking place among God's people in modern times. In a way, they too received an allotment of land. How so? Jehovah allowed his servants to enter a spiritual land and take possession of it. That being the case, the restoration of the ancient Promised Land can teach us much about the restoration of the spiritual land of God's people today. But before we

5, 6. (a) In Ezekiel's vision, what territory was to be assigned? (See opening picture.) (b) What was the purpose of the vision of land assignment?

7. (a) What events began in 537 B.C.E., reminding us of what? (b) What question will we consider first?

No matter what responsibility we care for in God's organization, Jehovah values our efforts
SEE PARAGRAPH 11

consider these lessons, let us first answer the question, "Why can we conclude that a spiritual land truly exists today?"

8. (a) Jehovah replaced the nation of natural Israelites with what nation? (b) What is the spiritual land, or paradise? (c) When did it come into existence, and who have settled in it?

8 In an earlier vision given to Ezekiel, Jehovah indicated that prophecies about Israel's restoration would see a greater fulfillment after his "servant David," Jesus Christ, began to rule as King. (Ezek. 37:24) That event occurred in 1914 C.E. By that time, the nation of natural Israelites had long since been replaced as God's people by a nation of spiritual Israelites, made up of spirit-anointed Christians. **(Read Matthew 21:43; 1 Peter 2:9.)** However, Jehovah replaced not only the natural nation of Israel with a spiritual nation but also the physical land of Israel with a spiritual land, or paradise. (Isa. 66:8) As we saw in Chapter 17 of this publication, the spiritual land is the secure spiritual environment, or realm of activity, in which the remnant of the anointed ones have been

worshipping Jehovah since 1919. (See box 9B, "Why 1919?") As time progressed, those with an earthly hope, the "other sheep," also began to settle in this spiritual land. (John 10:16) While the spiritual paradise continues to develop and expand today, its blessings will be experienced to the fullest extent only after Armageddon.

Dividing the Land Evenly and Precisely

9 **Read Ezekiel 48:1, 28.** After having established the outer boundaries of the land, Jehovah described in detail how to allot the land itself. He directed that the 12 tribal inheritances be laid out evenly and precisely from north to south, starting with the tribe of Dan at the northern tip of the land and ending with the tribe of Gad at the southernmost boundary. Each of the 12 inheritances consisted of a horizontal strip of territory stretching from the land's outer boundary in the east to the Great Sea, or the Mediterranean Sea, in the west. —Ezek. 47:20.

10 What assurances did this part of the vision likely convey to the exiles? The detailed description that Ezekiel gave of the land allotment must have impressed on the exiles that the dividing of the land would be a well-organized project. Moreover, the precise division of the land among all 12 tribes underlined that every one of the returned exiles would receive a secure inheritance in the restored land. No one would return only to end up landless or homeless.

11 What strengthening lessons can we draw from this vision today? The restored Promised Land had a place not only for the priests, the Levites, and the chieftains but also for all other members of the 12 tribes. (Ezek. 45:4, 5, 7, 8) Similarly today, the spiritual paradise has a place not only for the anointed remnant and for those among the "great crowd" who take the lead but also for all other members of the great crowd.[1] (Rev. 7:9) No matter how modest our role in the organization may be, we have a secure place and a valuable assignment in the spiritual land. What a heartwarming assurance!

Two Significant Differences—What Do They Mean for Us?

12 Some of Jehovah's instructions about the allotting of land might have puzzled Ezekiel because they differed from those that God had given Moses. Consider two such differences. One has to do with the land; the other, with its inhabitants.

9. What detailed instructions did Jehovah give about the allotment of the land itself?

10. What assurances did this part of the vision likely convey to the exiles?

11. What lessons can we draw from the prophetic vision of the land allotment? (See the box "The Allotment of the Land.")

12, 13. What specific instructions did Jehovah give about assigning the tribes shares in the land?

FOOTNOTE

[1] For a consideration of the special place and assignment that Jehovah has set apart for the priesthood and the chieftain in the spiritual land, see Chapter 14 of this publication.

14. How did Jehovah's instructions regarding the foreign residents go beyond what had been stated in the Mosaic Law?

[13] *First, the land.* Moses had been instructed to give the larger tribes more land than the smaller ones. (Num. 26:52-54) However, in Ezekiel's vision, Jehovah gave specific instructions to assign all tribes *"equal* shares ["each like his brother," ftn.]." (Ezek. 47:14) Thus, the distance from the northern border to the southern border in a tribal inheritance was to be exactly the same in each of the 12 allotments. All Israelites —no matter which tribe they belonged to—would have equal access to the natural bounty that the well-watered Promised Land was capable of producing.

[14] *Second, the inhabitants.* The Mosaic Law protected foreigners and allowed them to share in worshipping Jehovah, but they had no share in the land. (Lev. 19:33, 34) However, what Jehovah now told Ezekiel went beyond what He had stated in the Law. Jehovah instructed him: "Give the foreign resident an *inheritance* in the territory of the tribe where he has taken up residence." With that command, Jehovah swept away a major difference between the "native-born Israelites" and the foreign residents in the land. (Ezek. 47:22, 23) In the

Do we reflect Jehovah's impartiality and heartfelt respect for others?
SEE PARAGRAPHS 15, 16

restored land that Ezekiel saw in vision, he observed among its inhabitants equality and unity in worship.—Lev. 25:23.

15 These two remarkable instructions that Ezekiel received about the land and its people must have reassured the exiles. They knew that Jehovah would allot an equal place to them, whether they were Israelites by birth or were foreigners who worshipped Jehovah. (Ezra 8:20; Neh. 3:26; 7:6, 25; Isa. 56:3, 8) These instructions also confirmed the uplifting and eternal truth that to Jehovah, all his servants are equally precious. **(Read Haggai 2:7.)** Today, whether we have a heavenly hope or an earthly one, we cherish that same truth.

16 How do we benefit from considering these details about the land and the inhabitants? We are reminded that equality and unity need to be outstanding features of our worldwide brotherhood today. Jehovah is not partial. We need to ask ourselves: 'Do I reflect Jehovah's impartiality? Do I treat each fellow worshipper with heartfelt respect, no matter what his racial background or circumstances in life may be?' (Rom. 12:10) We rejoice that Jehovah has given all of us equal access to the spiritual paradise, where we render whole-souled sacred service to our heavenly Father and enjoy his blessings. —Gal. 3:26-29; Rev. 7:9.

17 Let us now consider the fourth assurance given in the final part of Ezekiel's last vision—the promise that Jehovah would be with the exiles. What lessons can we learn from that promise? We will find the answer in the following chapter.

15. What eternal truth about Jehovah was confirmed by his instructions about the land and its inhabitants?

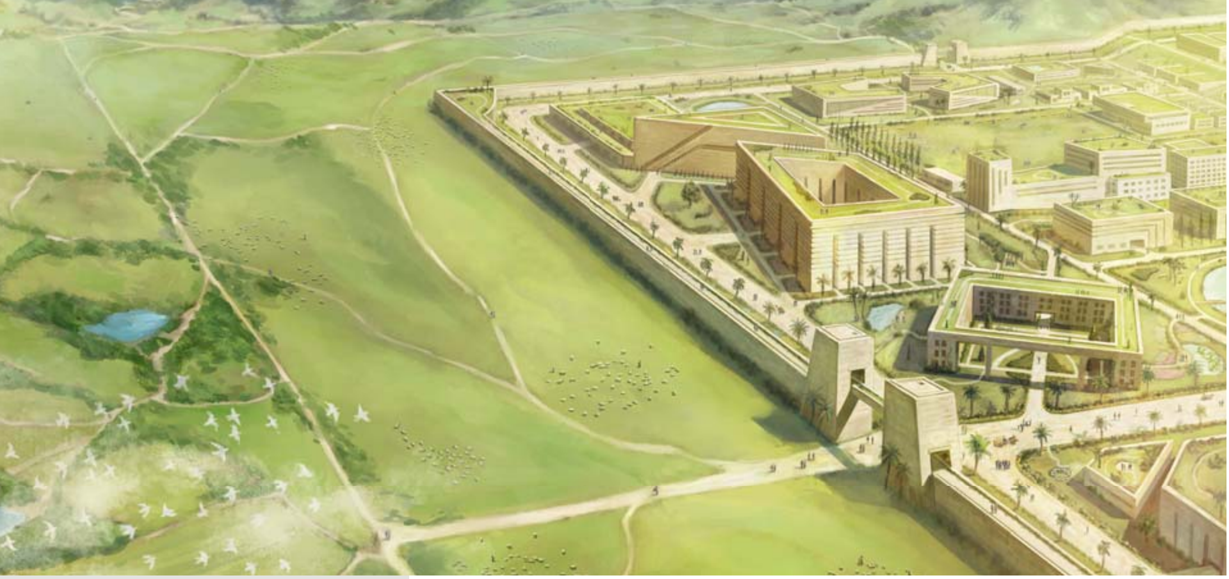
16, 17. (a) How do we benefit from considering the details about the land and the inhabitants? (b) What will we consider in the following chapter?

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 Why do you believe that a spiritual paradise exists today?

2 Why can you be sure that you have a secure place and a valuable assignment in the spiritual paradise?

3 What does the prophetic vision of the land allotment teach you about Jehovah?



21

“THE NAME OF THE CITY . . . WILL BE JEHOVAH IS THERE”

EZEKIEL 48:35

FOCUS: *The meaning of the city and the contribution*

IN HIS final vision, Ezekiel learns about a portion of the land that is to be set apart for a special purpose. The portion set apart is offered, not as an inheritance for a tribe of Israelites, but as a contribution to Jehovah. Ezekiel also learns about a remarkable city with an intriguing name. This part of the vision provides the exiles with a most important assurance: Jehovah will be with them when they return to their beloved homeland.

[2] Ezekiel gives us a detailed description of that contribution. Let us examine this account, which is filled with meaning for us as true worshippers of Jehovah.

“The Holy Contribution Along With . . . the City”

[3] The special portion of land measured 25,000 cubits (eight miles) from north to south and 25,000 cubits from east to west. This square piece of land was called “the *whole* contribution.” It was divided into three horizontal sections. The

1, 2. (a) What special portion of the land is to be set apart? (See picture on cover.) (b) The vision provides the exiles with what assurance?

3. What five areas made up the land that Jehovah set apart, and what purpose did those areas serve? (See the box “The Contribution That You Are to Set Apart.”)

upper section was for the Levites, and the middle section was set aside for the temple and the priests. Those two sections formed "the *holy* contribution." The smaller lower section, or "the remaining area," was "for *common* use." It was for the city.—Ezek. 48:15, 20.

4 What lesson can we draw from this account about the contribution to Jehovah? By setting apart *first* the land for this special contribution and *then* the land for the tribes, Jehovah indicated that primary importance must be given to this spiritual center of the land. (Ezek. 45:1) No doubt, the exiles learned much from this order of importance in land allotment. They needed to give Jehovah's worship the foremost place in life. Today, we similarly view spiritual activities, such as studying God's Word, attending Christian meetings, and sharing in the preaching work, as being of primary importance. When we imitate Jehovah's example of setting the right priorities, we keep our daily lives centered on worship of him.

"The City Will Be in the Middle of It"

5 **Read Ezekiel 48:15.** What was the significance of "the city" and its surrounding land? (Ezek. 48:16-18) In the vision, Jehovah had told Ezekiel: "The possession of the city . . . will belong to all the house of Israel." (Ezek. 45:6, 7) Thus, the city and its surrounding land did not belong to "the holy contribution" that was to be "set apart to Jehovah." (Ezek. 48:9) With that distinction in mind, let us examine what the arrangement of this city might teach us today.

6 To determine what lessons we may draw from the city, we need to establish first what this city could not be. It could *not* refer to the rebuilt city of Jerusalem with its temple. Why not? Because the visionary city seen by Ezekiel would have no temple within it. Also, the city did *not* refer to any other city in the restored land of Israel. Why not? Because no city with the features described in this vision was ever built by the returned exiles or their descendants. Further, the city could *not* refer to a heavenly city. Why not? Because it was built on land destined "for common [or, nonsacred] use" as distinct from structures built on land exclusively set aside for sacred worship.—Ezek. 42:20.

7 What, then, is the city that Ezekiel saw? Remember that he saw the city in the same vision in which he saw the land. (Ezek. 40:2; 45:1, 6) God's Word indicates that the land refers to a spiritual land, so the city must refer to a spiritual

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4. What lesson can be drawn from the account about the contribution to Jehovah?

5, 6. (a) To whom did the city belong? (b) To what does the city *not* refer, and why not?

7. What is the city that Ezekiel saw, and what does it seem to represent? (See opening picture.)

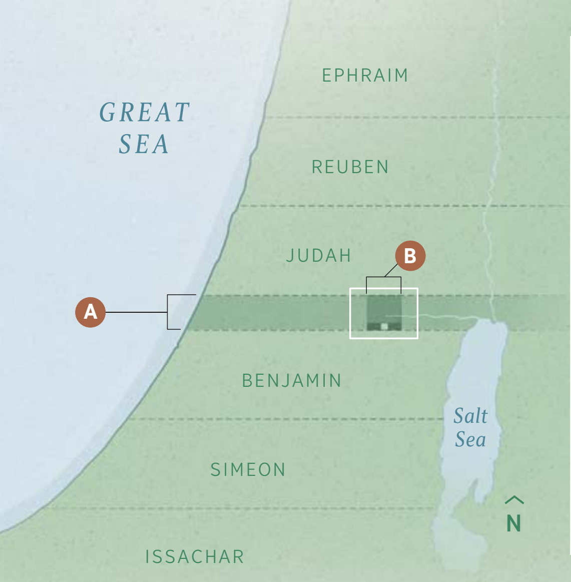
21A

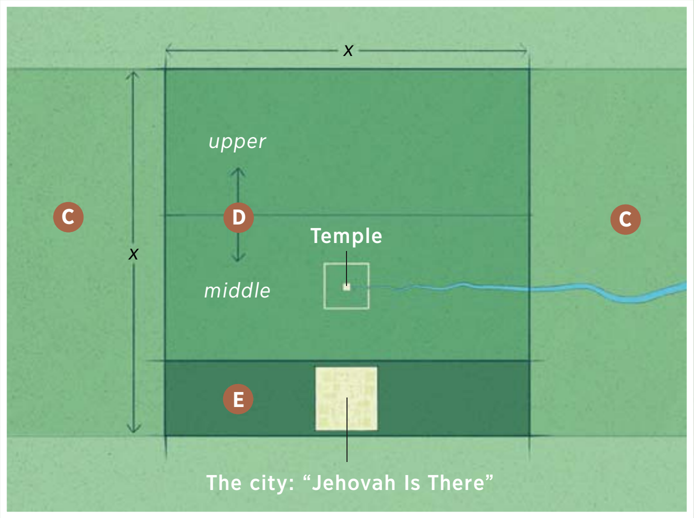
“THE CONTRIBUTION THAT YOU ARE TO SET APART”

EZEKIEL 48:8

SEE PARAGRAPH 3

Let us follow Ezekiel as he takes a closer look at the portion of land that Jehovah sets apart. It comprises five areas. What are they? And what purpose do they serve?





x = 25,000 cubits (eight miles)

A “The Contribution”

It is for governmental use and is referred to as “the administrative strip.”

EZEK. 48:8

B “The Whole Contribution”

It is set aside for the priests, the Levites, and the city. Also, individuals from all 12 tribes enter this portion to worship Jehovah and to support the administrative arrangement.

EZEK. 48:20

C “The Chieftain’s Territory”

“This land will become his possession in Israel.” “It will be for the chieftain.”

EZEK. 45:7, 8; 48:21, 22

D “The Holy Contribution”

This area is also described as “a holy portion.” The *upper* section is “for the Levites.” It is “something holy.” The *middle* section is “the holy contribution for the priests.” It is “a place for their houses and a sacred place for the sanctuary,” or temple.

EZEK. 45:1-5; 48:9-14

E “The Remaining Area”

“It will belong to all the house of Israel” and “will be for common use of the city, for housing and pasture ground.”

EZEK. 45:6; 48:15-19

city. In general, what is conveyed by the word "city"? The word conveys the idea of people living together as a group and forming something structured and organized. Thus, the well-ordered city that Ezekiel saw—which was laid out as a perfect square—seems to represent a well-organized seat of administration.

8 What is the realm, or sphere of influence, of this administration? Ezekiel's vision reveals that this city functions *within* the spiritual land. Thus, this administration functions today *within* the realm of activity of God's people. And what is indicated by the fact that the city stands on common, or nonsacred, land? It reminds us that the city refers, not to a heavenly, but to an earthly administration, which has been functioning for the benefit of all who inhabit the spiritual paradise.

9 Who make up this earthly administration? In Ezekiel's vision, the one taking the lead in the city government was referred to as "the chieftain." (Ezek. 45:7) He was an overseer among the people, but he was neither a priest nor a Levite. This chieftain makes us think particularly of congregation overseers today who are not spirit-anointed. These caring spiritual shepherds from among the "other sheep" are humble earthly servants of Christ's heavenly government. (John 10:16) During the coming Millennium, Jesus will select and appoint "in all the earth" qualified elders, or "princes." (Ps. 45:16) Under the direction of the heavenly Kingdom, they will care for the interests of God's people during the Millennium.

"Jehovah Is There"

10 **Read Ezekiel 48:35.** The name of the city is "Jehovah Is There." This name provides assurance that this is a city where the presence of Jehovah is felt. By showing Ezekiel this centrally located city, Jehovah, in effect, told the exiles: 'I will be with you *again!'* What an uplifting assurance!

11 What lessons can we draw from this part of Ezekiel's prophecy? The name of this citylike administration assures us as God's servants today that Jehovah does dwell with his faithful servants on earth now and *always* will. This meaningful name also stresses a vital truth: The city exists, not to give power to any men, but to implement Jehovah's loving and reasonable ways. For instance, Jehovah has not given the administration the authority to divide the land, so to speak,

8. What is the realm, or sphere of influence, of this administration, and why so?

9. (a) Who make up this earthly administration today? (b) What will Jesus do during the Millennium?

10. What is the name of the city, and what assurance does that provide?

11. What lessons can we draw from Ezekiel's vision about the city and its meaningful name?

as mere humans may see fit. Instead, Jehovah expects the administrators to honor the allotments, or privileges, that he himself has given to his servants, including the "lowly" ones. —Prov. 19:17; Ezek. 46:18; 48:29.

12 What is yet another remarkable feature of the city "Jehovah Is There"? While ancient cities had walls for protection with as few gates as possible, this city has 12 gates! (Ezek. 48:30-34) This large number of gates (three on each side of the square city) illustrates that the administrators of this city are approachable and available to all of God's servants. Further, the city's having *12* gates emphasizes that it is open to everyone, "*all* the house of Israel." (Ezek. 45:6) The open character of the city serves as an important reminder to Christian overseers. Jehovah wants them to be approachable and to be readily available to all those living in the spiritual paradise.

God's People "Come in to Worship" and "Are Serving the City"

13 Let us go back to the time of Ezekiel and find out what further details he records in this extensive vision of the allotment of the land. Jehovah mentions people sharing in various forms of service. Priests—"ministers of the sanctuary"—were to offer sacrifices and approach Jehovah to minister to him. And Levites—"ministers of the temple"—were to "take care of its service and all the things that should be done in it." (Ezek. 44:14-16; 45:4, 5) Further, workers would be active near the city. Who are these workers?

14 The workers near the city come from among "*all* the tribes of Israel." They have a supportive role. Their task is to grow crops that "will provide food for those serving the city." (Ezek. 48:18, 19) Does this arrangement remind us of an opportunity that we have today? Yes. Today *all* inhabitants of the spiritual paradise have the opportunity to support the service of Christ's anointed brothers and the service of those among the "great crowd" whom Jehovah has appointed to take the lead. (Rev. 7:9, 10) A main way that we provide this support is by willingly cooperating with direction from the faithful slave.

15 Ezekiel's vision contains yet another detail from which we can derive a lesson regarding our ministry. What detail? Jehovah mentions that members of the 12 non-Levite tribes would be active in *two* locations: in the temple courtyard and

---

12. (a) What is a remarkable feature of this city, and what does this illustrate? (b) This aspect of the vision provides Christian overseers with what important reminder?

13. What did Jehovah mention about the various services people would perform?

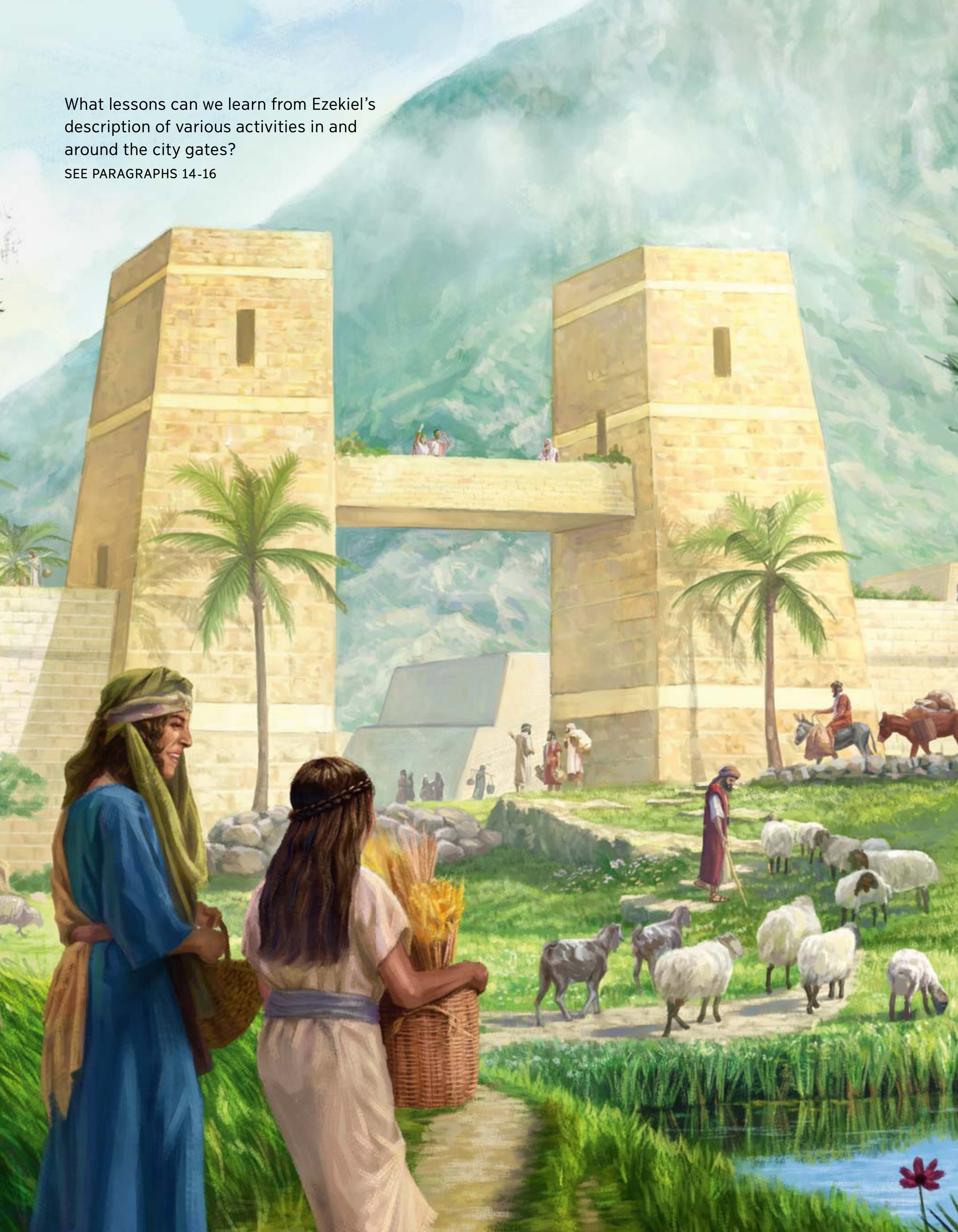
14. The workers near the city remind us of what?

15, 16. (a) What other detail can we glean from Ezekiel's vision? (b) We have the opportunity to engage in what similar activities?

Christian overseers are easily approachable and readily available
SEE PARAGRAPH 12

on the city's pastureland. What is their activity in each location? In the courtyard of the temple, all tribes "come in to *worship*" by offering *sacrifices* to Jehovah. (Ezek. 46:9, 24) On the land of the city, members of all tribes come to *support* the city by *cultivating* its land. What can we learn from the example of these workers?

16 Today, members of the great crowd have the opportunity to engage in activities similar to those carried out in Ezekiel's vision. They *worship* Jehovah "in his *temple*" by offering *sacrifices* of praise. (Rev. 7:9-15) They do so by sharing in the preaching work and by expressing their faith aloud at Christian meetings. They view the rendering of direct worship to Jehovah as their foremost responsibility. (1 Chron. 16:29) In addition, many among God's people are able to *support* God's organization in numerous practical ways. For instance, they help in constructing and maintaining Kingdom Halls and branch facilities, and they assist in many other projects initiated by Jehovah's organization. Others support these projects with their financial contributions. They do all



What lessons can we learn from Ezekiel’s description of various activities in and around the city gates?

SEE PARAGRAPHS 14-16

such *cultivating* of the land, so to speak, “for God’s glory.” (1 Cor. 10:31) They carry out their work zealously and joyfully because they know that Jehovah is “well-pleased with such sacrifices.” (Heb. 13:16) Are you taking full advantage of these opportunities?

“There Are New Heavens and a New Earth That We Are Awaiting”

17 In the future, will we see a larger fulfillment of Ezekiel’s vision of the contribution? Yes! Consider this: Ezekiel saw that the land portion named “the holy contribution” was the center of the land. (Ezek. 48:10) Similarly, after Armageddon, no matter where we may live on earth, Jehovah will be dwelling with us. (Rev. 21:3) During the Millennium, the citylike administration—that is, those on earth who will be appointed to care for the interests of God’s people—will expand its influence around the globe by giving loving guidance and direction to all those who make up the “new earth,” a new human society.—2 Pet. 3:13.

18 Why can we be sure that the citylike administration will remain in complete harmony with God’s rulership? Because God’s Word makes clear that the earthly city with 12 gates reflects the heavenly city with 12 gates, New Jerusalem, which is made up of Christ’s 144,000 corulers. (Rev. 21:2, 12, 21-27) This indicates that the earthly administration will mirror all decisions made by God’s Kingdom in heaven and will carefully carry them out. Yes, the name of the city “Jehovah Is There” assures each one of us that pure worship will remain and will flourish forever in Paradise. What a beautiful future awaits us!

17. (a) What larger fulfillment of Ezekiel’s vision will we see in the future? (b) During the Millennium, who will benefit from the citylike administration?

18. (a) Why can we be sure that the citylike administration will be in harmony with God’s rulership? (b) The name of the city gives us what firm assurance?

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 What lesson about setting priorities can you draw from the vision about the contribution to Jehovah?

2 How can you support the activities of the faithful slave?

3 What do you view as your foremost responsibility?

22

“WORSHIP GOD”

REVELATION 22:9

FOCUS: *Review principal themes of the book of Ezekiel and how they apply both today and in the future*

1, 2. (a) What choice do we all face? (b) How did a faithful angel respond when offered worship?

EACH one of us must answer a crucial question: Whom will I worship? Many might say that this issue is complex and that the options are confusing. In reality, however, the choice is clear and simple. Either we worship Jehovah God or we worship Satan the Devil.

2 Satan craves worship. That became especially evident when he tempted Jesus. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this publication, Satan offered Jesus a remarkable prize—authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. What did the Devil want in return? “Do an act of worship to me,” he urged Jesus. (Matt. 4:9) By contrast, the angel who delivered the revelation to the apostle John refused to be venerated. **(Read Revelation 22:8, 9.)** When John offered to worship the angel, that humble spirit son of God responded: “Do not do that!” Instead of saying, ‘Worship me,’ the angel said, “Worship God.”

3 The goal of this publication has been to strengthen our resolve to do as that angel commanded—worship Jehovah God exclusively. (Deut. 10:20; Matt. 4:10) Let us briefly review what we have learned about pure worship from Ezekiel's prophecies and visions. Then, with the help of the Scriptures, we will peer into the future to the time when every person on earth will face a final test—a test that will determine who will live to see pure worship of Jehovah fully restored for all time.

Three Themes Emphasized in the Book of Ezekiel

4 The book of Ezekiel teaches us that pure worship does not involve performing mere formal rituals. It requires that we (1) offer Jehovah exclusive devotion, (2) remain united in clean worship, and (3) demonstrate love for others. Consider how the prophecies and visions discussed in this publication highlight these three themes.

First theme: Offer Jehovah exclusive devotion

5 *Chapter 3:*[1] The stunning vision of Jehovah surrounded by a rainbow and riding above powerful spirit creatures impresses on us a fundamental fact—the Almighty alone is worthy of our worship.—Ezek. 1:4, 15-28.

6 *Chapter 5:* How shocking it was to see the vision of Jehovah's temple being defiled! The vision demonstrates that nothing is hidden from Jehovah. He sees disloyal acts, such as when his people turn to worshipping idols, even when the acts are hidden from human eyes. He is hurt by such acts and punishes those who practice them.—Ezek. 8:1-18.

7 *Chapter 7:* The judgments pronounced against the surrounding nations that treated Israel with "utter scorn" prove that Jehovah holds accountable those who mistreat his people. (Ezek. 25:6) But we also learn another lesson from Israel's dealings with those nations—we must put loyalty to Jehovah above all else. Never would we lower our standards to fit in with relatives who do not worship Jehovah; nor would we place our trust in wealth or compromise our neutrality by giving to human governments the allegiance that only Jehovah deserves.

8 *Chapters 13 and 14:* The vision of the temple on the lofty mountain teaches us that we must live up to Jehovah's elevated standards, recognizing that he is above all other gods.—Ezek. 40:1–48:35.

3. (a) What has been the goal of this publication? (b) What will we now consider?

4. What three themes are emphasized in the book of Ezekiel?

5-9. What have we learned about offering Jehovah exclusive devotion?

FOOTNOTE

[1] The chapter numbers refer to chapters in this publication.

10-14. How has the need for us to remain united in clean worship been emphasized?

15-18. Why must we continue to demonstrate love, and how can we do so?

9 *Chapter 15:* The prophetic descriptions of Israel and Judah as being like prostitutes remind us of just how repugnant spiritual adultery is to Jehovah.—Ezek., chaps. 16, 23.

Second theme: Remain united in clean worship

10 *Chapter 8:* The prophecies promising that Jehovah would raise up "one shepherd" to care for His people stress the need for us to work unitedly and peaceably under Jesus' leadership.—Ezek. 34:23, 24; 37:24-28.

11 *Chapter 9:* Ezekiel's prophecies about God's people being released from Babylonian captivity and restored to their homeland contain a message for those who want to please Jehovah today. Clean worshippers of Jehovah must break free from and remain free from the contaminating influence of false religion. Despite coming from countless religious, economic, and ethnic backgrounds, we must maintain the unity that helps identify us as God's people.—Ezek. 11:17, 18; 12:24; John 17:20-23.

12 *Chapter 10:* The theme of unity was highlighted by the vision of the dry bones coming to life. What a privilege we have to be among the restored group of cleansed worshippers who work together as an army!—Ezek. 37:1-14.

13 *Chapter 12:* Unity was especially emphasized by the prophecy of the two sticks becoming one. How faith-strengthening it is to see the anointed and the other sheep fulfill that prophecy! Despite living in a world divided by religious and political hatred, we remain bound together by love and loyalty.—Ezek. 37:15-23.

14 *Chapter 16:* The vision of the man with the inkhorn and the men with smashing weapons contains a sobering warning—only those who enter the "great tribulation" as pure worshippers will be in a position to be marked for survival.—Matt. 24:21; Ezek. 9:1-11.

Third theme: Demonstrate love for others

15 *Chapter 4:* The vision of the four living creatures taught us about Jehovah's qualities, the foremost being love. When we speak and act in a loving manner, we prove that Jehovah is our God.—Ezek. 1:5-14; 1 John 4:8.

16 *Chapters 6 and 11:* God's love motivated him to commission watchmen, such as Ezekiel. Because God is love, he does not want any to be destroyed when he brings an end to Satan's domination of the earth. (2 Pet. 3:9) We have the privilege of reflecting God's love by fulfilling our responsibility to support the work of the modern-day watchman.—Ezek. 33:1-9.

17 *Chapters 17 and 18:* Jehovah knows that many will reject his mercy and will attempt to wipe out his loyal worshippers. Love will move Jehovah to defend his people when "Gog of the land of Magog" launches an attack on those who are loyal to Him. Love for others motivates us to warn as many as possible that Jehovah will destroy those who oppress his people.—Ezek. 38:1–39:20; 2 Thess. 1:6, 7.

18 *Chapters 19, 20, and 21:* Jehovah's love for people is strikingly evident in the visions depicting the stream of life-giving water and the apportioning of the land. The visions describe the results of Jehovah's greatest act of love, giving the life of his Son so that we might have our sins forgiven and enjoy perfect life as part of God's family. One of the best ways to show our love for people is to tell them about the beautiful future Jehovah has prepared for those who put faith in his Son.—Ezek. 45:1-7; 47:1–48:35; Rev. 21:1-4; 22:17.

After the Millennial Reign, a Remarkable Act of Humility

19 During the Thousand Year Reign, Jesus will bring billions back to life and heal the pain caused by our "enemy, death." (1 Cor. 15:26; Mark 5:38-42; Acts 24:15) The history of mankind has been like a heartbreaking story filled with sadness and loss. But as each generation is brought back to life, Jesus will be erasing the tragic story and giving the resurrected ones the opportunity to write a better story. On the basis of the ransom sacrifice, he will undo all the harm caused by sickness, war, disease, and famine. More than that, he will help us dig out and destroy the root cause of our sorrow—the sin we inherited from Adam. (Rom. 5:18, 19) Jesus will completely "break up the works of the Devil." (1 John 3:8) What takes place then?

20 **Read 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.** When all mankind has perfect life, when the earth has finally been transformed into the Paradise that Jehovah originally intended, Jesus and his 144,000 corulers will display remarkable humility; they will hand over the Kingdom to Jehovah. Willingly, peacefully, they will give up the authority they exercised for the thousand years. All that the Kingdom accomplished will last forever.

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19. What will Jesus do during the Thousand Year Reign? (See the box "Facing the Final Test.")

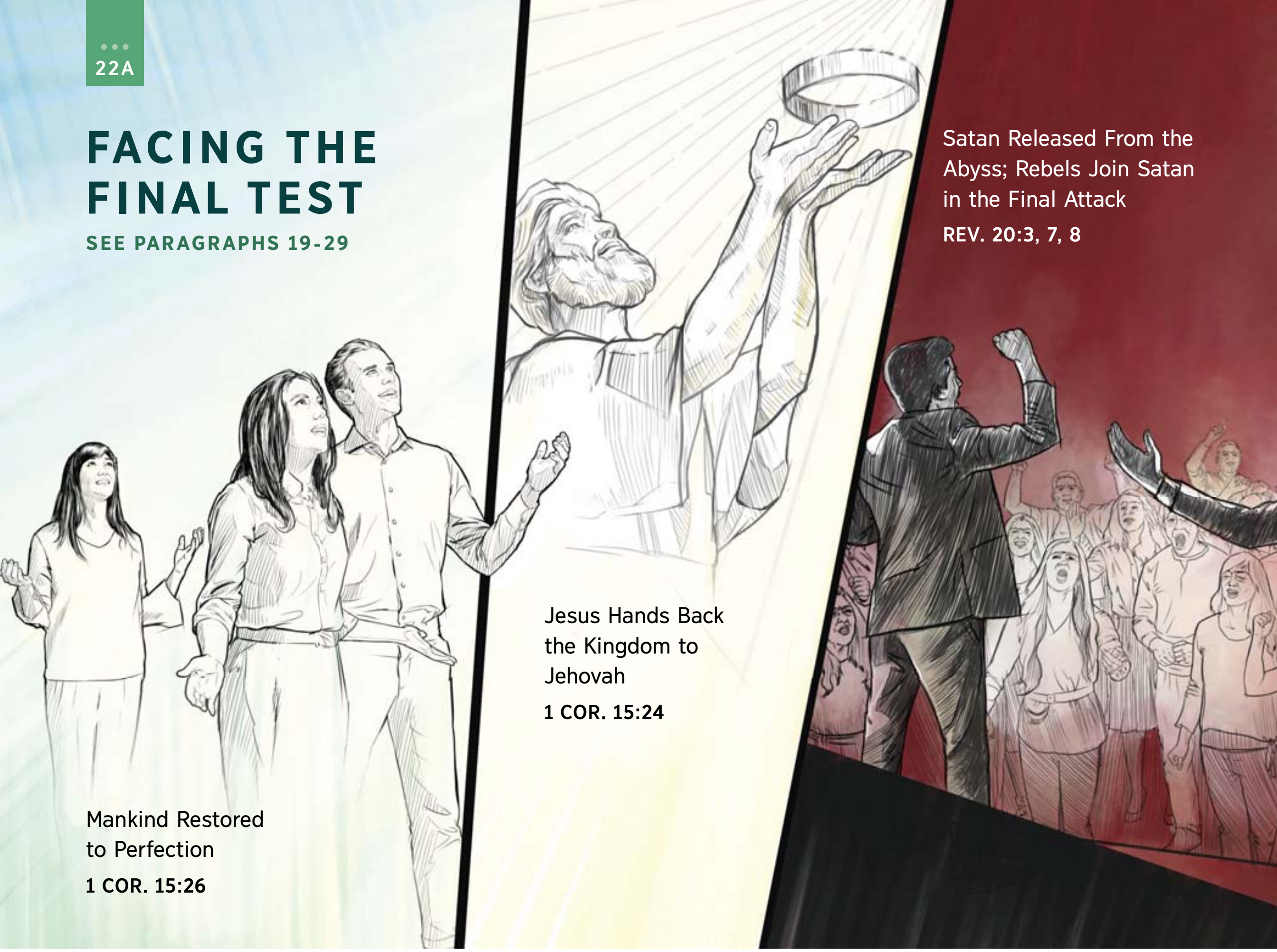
20. How will Jesus and the 144,000 display remarkable humility? Explain. (See opening picture.)

> Resurrected ones will have the opportunity to write a better story

22A

FACING THE FINAL TEST

SEE PARAGRAPHS 19-29



Mankind Restored to Perfection

1 COR. 15:26

Jesus Hands Back the Kingdom to Jehovah

1 COR. 15:24

Satan Released From the Abyss; Rebels Join Satan in the Final Attack

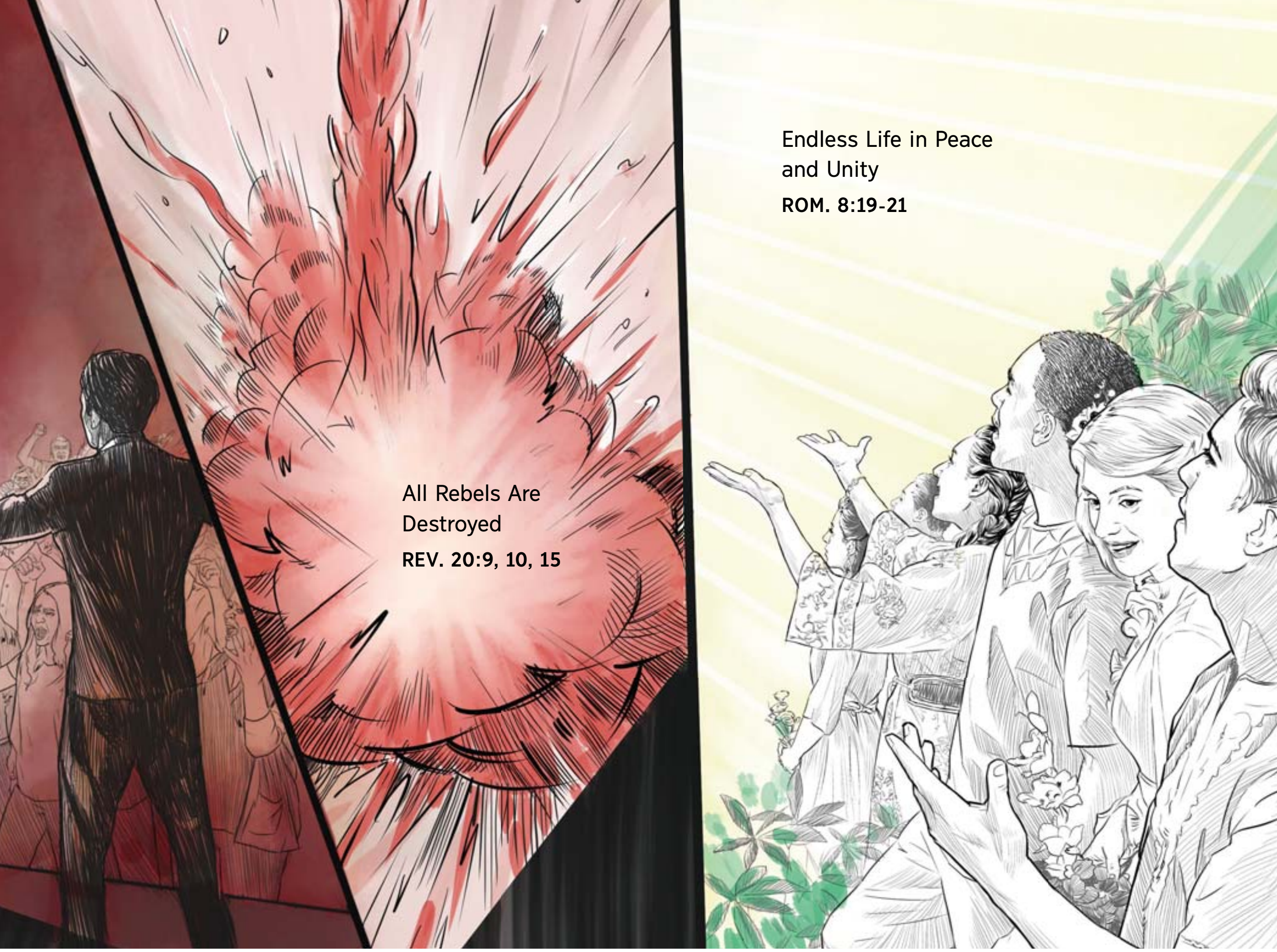
REV. 20:3, 7, 8

21, 22. (a) What will the world be like at the end of the thousand years? (b) Why will Jehovah release Satan and the demons?

The Final Test

21 Jehovah will then do something extraordinary, something that expresses great confidence in his earthly subjects. He will direct that Satan and the demons be released from the abyss in which they have been confined for the thousand years. **(Read Revelation 20:1-3.)** The world that greets them will be vastly different from the one they knew. Before Armageddon, the majority of mankind was misled by Satan and the unity of the human race was fractured by hate and prejudice. (Rev. 12:9) But at the end of the thousand years, all mankind will be worshipping Jehovah as a united, loving family. The earth will be one harmonious Paradise.

22 Why will Jehovah release such criminals as Satan and the demons into this clean environment? Because the major-



All Rebels Are Destroyed

REV. 20:9, 10, 15

Endless Life in Peace and Unity

ROM. 8:19-21

ity of those alive at the end of the thousand years will never have had their loyalty as faithful worshippers of Jehovah tested. Most died without knowing Jehovah and were then resurrected into Paradise. Jehovah not only gave them life but also provided for all their physical and spiritual needs. They will have experienced no negative influences, only positive peer pressure. They will have been surrounded by people who love and serve Jehovah. Satan could hurl at these resurrected ones the same accusation he leveled at Job—they serve God only because he protects and blesses them. (Job 1:9, 10) So before Jehovah writes our names permanently in the book of life, he will allow us a chance to prove beyond doubt that we are loyal to him as our Father and Sovereign. —Rev. 20:12, 15.

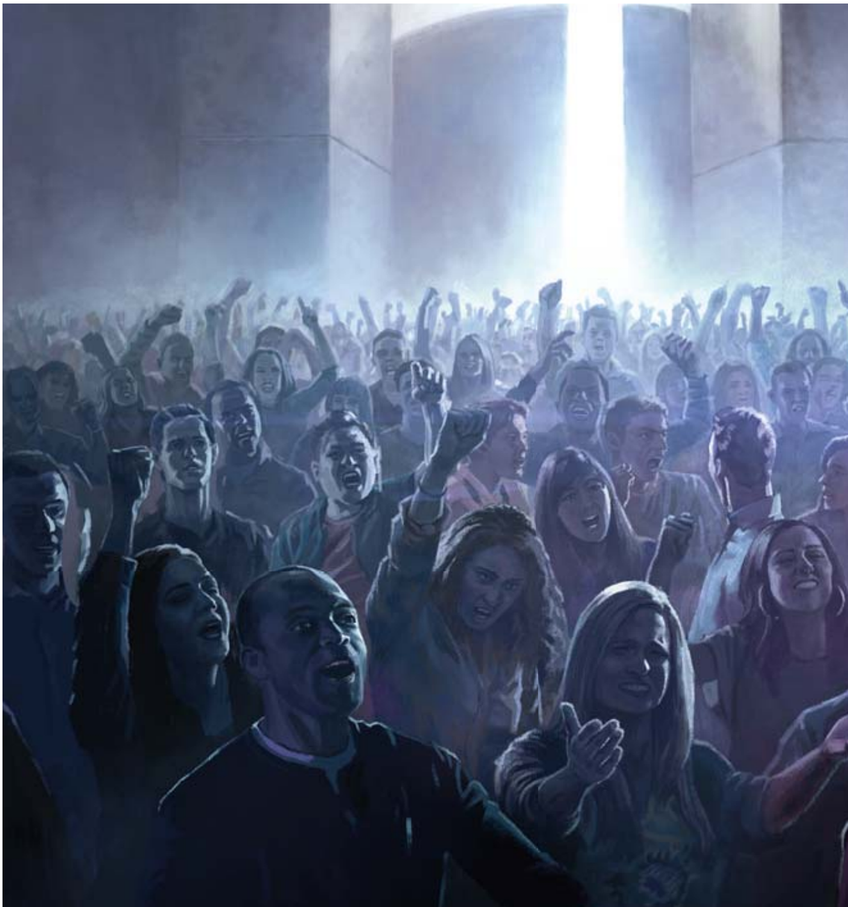
23. What issue will each individual face?

24. Why are those who rebel called Gog and Magog?

23 For a brief period, Satan will be given an opportunity to lure mankind away from serving God. What will that test be? No doubt, each individual will face an issue similar to the one that confronted Adam and Eve—either accept Jehovah's standards, support his rulership, and worship him or rebel against God and support Satan.

24 **Read Revelation 20:7-10.** Significantly, those who rebel at the end of the thousand years are called Gog and Magog. They exhibit traits similar to those shown by the rebels who Ezekiel prophesied would attack God's people during the great tribulation. That earlier horde, "Gog of the land of Magog," was divided into nations that opposed Jehovah's rule. (Ezek. 38:2) Similarly, those who rebel at the end of Christ's Millennial Rule are described as "nations." This is a telling description. Why? Because during the Thousand Year Reign, all nationalistic divisions will have been removed; all people will be subjects of one government, God's Kingdom. We will

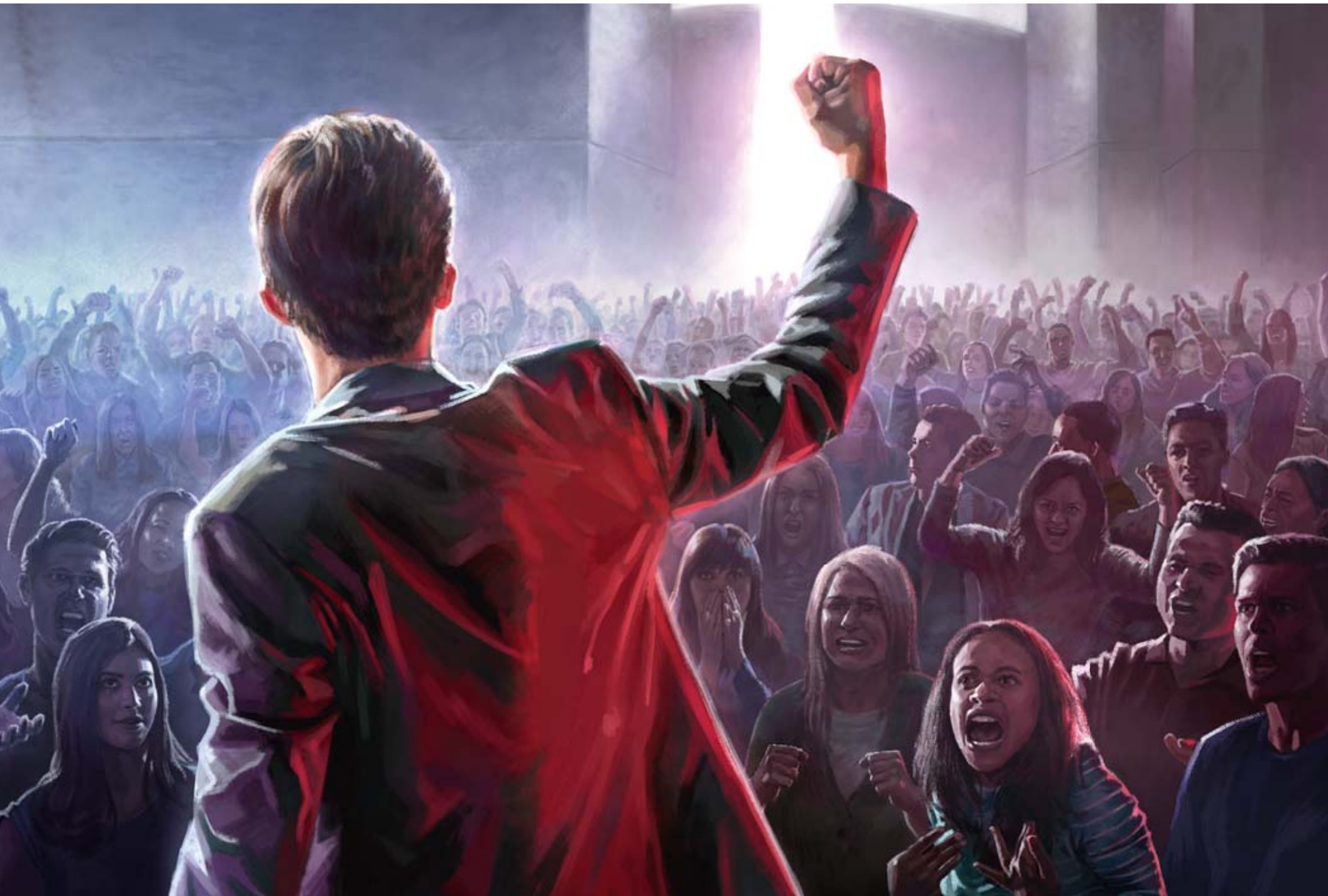
Those who rebel are called Gog and Magog
SEE PARAGRAPH 24

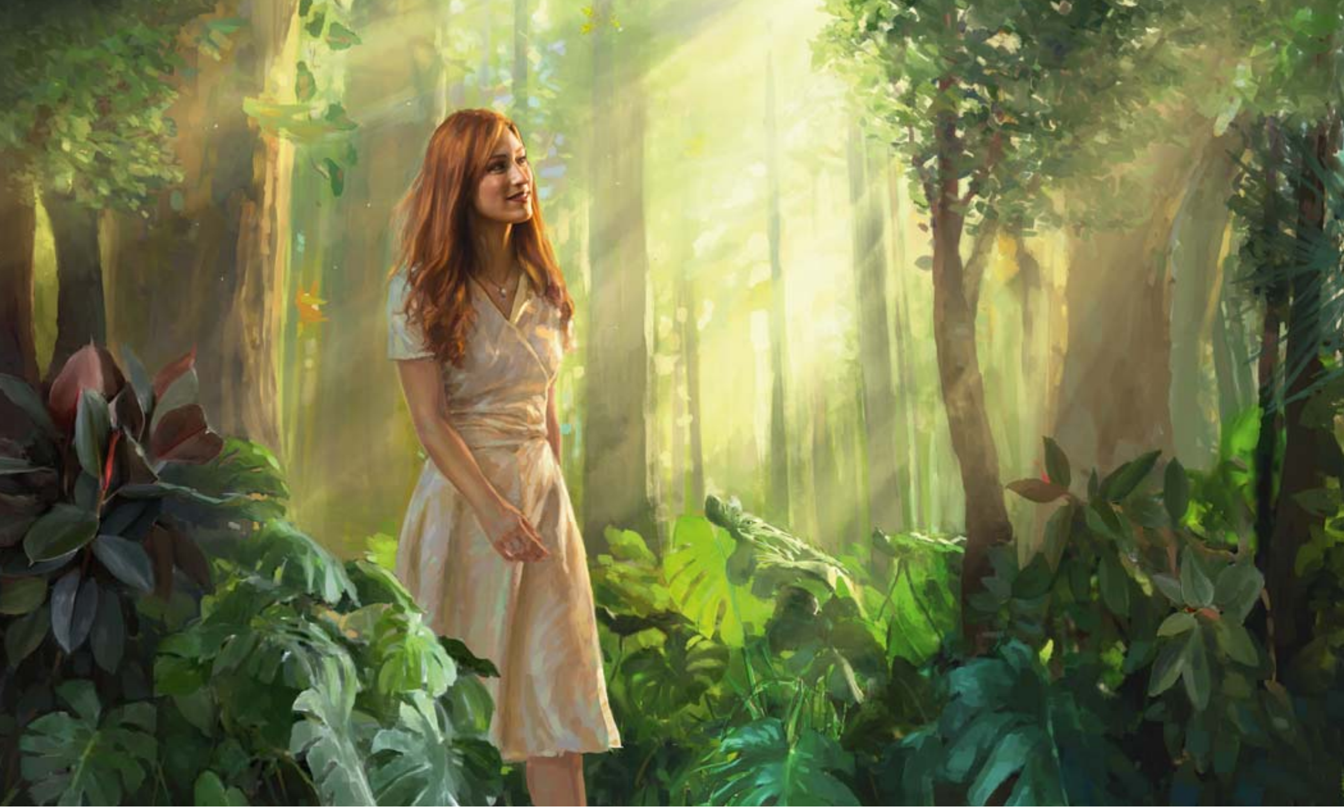


belong to one spiritual nation. By calling these rebels Gog and Magog and saying that they are "nations," the prophecy indicates that Satan will be successful in fostering divisions among some of God's people. None will be forced to take Satan's side. Each perfect individual will make his or her own choice.

25, 26. How many will join Satan, and what will happen to them?

25 How many will join Satan? The number of those who rebel are "as the sand of the sea." This expression does not necessarily mean that a large percentage of mankind will rebel. How do we know? Consider the promise made to Abraham. Jehovah said that Abraham's offspring would become like "the grains of sand on the seashore." (Gen. 22:17, 18) Yet, the number who made up his offspring ended up being 144,001 individuals. (Gal. 3:16, 29) That figure, while significant, is only a fraction of the total number of mankind. Similarly, the number who join Satan may be significant, but it will not be overwhelming. The rebels will pose no great threat to Jehovah's loyal servants.





When you are perfect,
you will stand before Jehovah
on your own merit,
completely without sin
SEE PARAGRAPH 28

27-29. What awaits those who pass the final test?

26 Those who join the rebellion will quickly be wiped out. Along with Satan and the demons, they will cease to exist —with no prospect of ever coming back to life. Only their bad decisions and the consequences of those decisions will be remembered for all time.—Rev. 20:10.

27 On the other hand, those who pass the final test will have their names permanently inscribed in "the book of life." (Rev. 20:15) Then, as a united family, all of Jehovah's loyal sons and daughters will give him the worship he so rightly deserves.

28 Think of that future. Ahead of you is a life of rewarding work and enriching friendships. Never again will you or your loved ones need to suffer. On your own merit, you will stand before Jehovah completely without sin. Every person will have an unrestricted friendship with God. And most important of all, in heaven and on earth, pure worship will be carried out in perfection. That will be the ultimate restoration of pure worship!

29 Will you be there to see that great day? You can be if you continue to apply the three key lessons from the book of Ezekiel—offer Jehovah exclusive devotion, remain united

in clean worship, and demonstrate love for others. The prophecies of Ezekiel offer one final, fundamental lesson. What is that?

"Know That I Am Jehovah"

30, 31. What will the declaration "they will have to know that I am Jehovah" mean (a) to God's enemies? (b) to God's people?

30 Throughout the book of Ezekiel, the declaration "they will have to know that I am Jehovah" recurs like a drum beat. (Ezek. 6:10; 39:28) For God's enemies, that declaration will mean war and death. They will be compelled to do more than acknowledge that Jehovah exists. They will learn the hard way the meaning of his great name—"He Causes to Become." "Jehovah of armies" will become "a powerful warrior" who will fight against them. (1 Sam. 17:45; Ex. 15:3) Too late, they will understand an essential truth about Jehovah: Nothing can stop him from fulfilling his purpose.

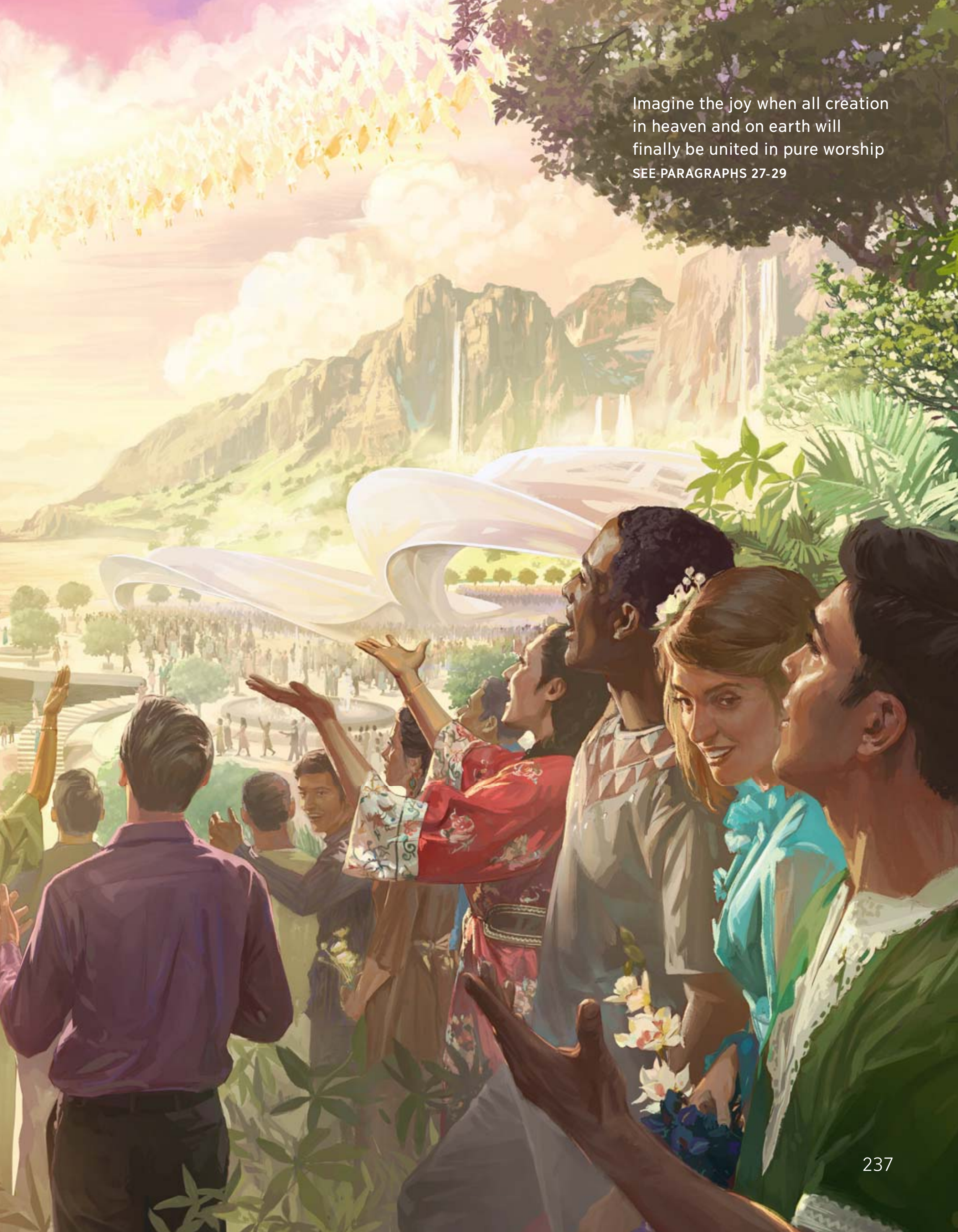
31 To God's people, the declaration "they will have to know that I am Jehovah" will mean peace and life. Jehovah will cause us to become what he originally intended us to be —sons and daughters who perfectly reflect his qualities. (Gen. 1:26) Already, Jehovah has become to us a loving Father and a protective Shepherd. Soon he will become our conquering King. Before that day arrives, let us take to heart Ezekiel's message. Let us prove by our words and actions each day that we know who Jehovah is and what he stands for. Then, when the destructive winds of the great tribulation are released, we will not be afraid. On the contrary, we will lift our heads up, for we will know that our deliverance is near. (Luke 21:28) In the meantime, may we help people everywhere to know and love the only God worthy of worship, the One with the greatest of all names—Jehovah.—Ezek. 28:26.

YOUR PLACE IN PURE WORSHIP

1 What lessons have we learned from the book of Ezekiel?

2 What do you look forward to enjoying during the Thousand Year Reign of Jesus Christ?

3 How can you prepare now for the final test?



Imagine the joy when all creation in heaven and on earth will finally be united in pure worship
SEE PARAGRAPHS 27-29

SUMMARY OF CLARIFICATIONS

Over the years, *The Watchtower* has adjusted our understanding of several aspects of Ezekiel's prophecy. And this publication, *Pure Worship of Jehovah—Restored At Last!,* contains a number of additional clarifications. See if you can answer the following questions.

What do the four faces of the living creatures represent?

Scriptures

Ezek. 1:4-6, 10; 10:2

Pure Worship

Chap. 4, pars. 5-14

Previous understanding: Each of the four faces of the living creatures, or cherubs, represents one of Jehovah's four cardinal attributes.

Clarification: While each one of the four faces of the living creatures stands for one of the four cardinal attributes of Jehovah, *when viewed together* the four faces embrace *all* the attributes that he possesses. Also, the four faces impress on us the surpassing greatness of Jehovah's might and glory.

Reasoning behind the change: In God's Word, the number four is often used to denote that which is all-embracing, or complete. Hence, when the *four* faces are depicted *together,* they form more than four individual attributes —they are the foundation of Jehovah's awe-inspiring personality. Also, each face belongs to a creature that embodies majesty, strength, and mightiness. Even so, all four mighty representatives of creation, as depicted by the four faces of each cherub, are situated *below* the throne of Jehovah. That depiction highlights that Jehovah is the Supreme Ruler over all.

Whom does the man with the secretary's inkhorn symbolize?

Scriptures

Ezek. 9:2

The Watchtower

June 2016, pp. 16-17

Pure Worship

Chap. 16, par. 18

Previous understanding: The man with the inkhorn represents the anointed remnant. By means of the preaching and disciple-making work, the anointed are now putting a symbolic mark on the foreheads of those who become part of the "great crowd."—Rev. 7:9.

Clarification: The man with the secretary's inkhorn pictures Jesus Christ. He will mark the great crowd when they are judged as sheep during the "great tribulation."—Matt. 24:21.

Reasoning behind the change: Jehovah has entrusted the judging to his Son. (John 5:22, 23) According to Matthew 25:31-33, Jesus will make the final judgment regarding who are "sheep" and who are "goats."

Do the prostitute sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, prefigure Christendom with its division between the Catholic and Protestant faiths?

Scriptures

Ezek. 23:1-4

Pure Worship

Chap. 15, box 15A

Previous understanding: Oholah (Samaria, capital of Israel), the older sister, pictures Catholicism; Oholibah (Jerusalem, capital of Judah), the younger sister, pictures Protestantism.

Clarification: These prostitute sisters are not prophetic types of any parts of Christendom. Rather, their existence serves to teach us about how Jehovah feels when those who were once his loyal people commit spiritual prostitution. His feelings regarding all false religion are similar.

Reasoning behind the change: There is no Scriptural indication that Oholah and Oholibah are prophetic types of Christendom. Israel and Judah were once like faithful wives to Jehovah, but Christendom has never had such a relationship with Jehovah. Further, the comparisons of God's unfaithful people to prostitutes in chapters 16 and 23 of Ezekiel offer hope of reform and restoration. Christendom, as part of Babylon the Great, has no such hope.

Is Christendom the antitype of ancient apostate Jerusalem?

Pure Worship

Chap. 16, box 16A

Previous understanding: Unfaithful Jerusalem is a prophetic type of Christendom. Hence, the destruction of Jerusalem prophetically foreshadowed that of Christendom.

Clarification: Conditions in unfaithful Jerusalem—such as idolatry and widespread corruption—*remind us* of Christendom, but we no longer refer to Christendom as the *antitypical Jerusalem.*

Reasoning behind the change: There is no clear Scriptural basis for such a type-antitype approach. Unlike ancient Jerusalem, Christendom has never practiced pure worship. And while Jerusalem did receive Jehovah's forgiveness for a time, there is no such prospect ahead for Christendom.

How was the vision of the valley of dry bones fulfilled?

Scriptures

Ezek. 37:1-14

The Watchtower

March 2016, pp. 29-31

Pure Worship

Chap. 10, pars. 9-14

Previous understanding: In 1918 the persecuted anointed were brought into captivity to Babylon the Great, experiencing a deathlike condition of near inactivity. That short captivity ended in 1919 when Jehovah revived them as Kingdom proclaimers.

Clarification: The deathlike condition of spiritual captivity lasted a very long time and began much earlier than 1918. It started in the second century C.E. and ended in 1919 C.E. and basically parallels the long growing season in Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds.

Reasoning behind the change: The captivity of ancient Israel lasted a long time, beginning in 740 B.C.E. and ending in 537 B.C.E. Ezekiel's prophecy describes the bones as "dry" or "very dry," suggesting that those represented by the bones had been dead for a very long time. And the restoration of the bones is described as a gradual process that would take time.

What is the meaning of the joining together of the two sticks?

Scriptures
Ezek. 37:15-17

The Watchtower
July 2016, pp. 31-32

Pure Worship
Chap. 12, pars. 13-14, and box 12A

Previous understanding: After a brief period of disunity during World War I, faithful members of the anointed remnant regained their unity in 1919.

Clarification: The prophecy highlights that Jehovah will cause his worshippers to become one. After 1919, as time progressed, members of the anointed remnant were joined by an increasing number of those with an earthly hope. Both groups are worshipping Jehovah together as one people.

Reasoning behind the change: The prophecy does not describe one stick that is first torn in two and then later brought together as one. Thus, the prophecy does not describe one group that would be divided and then later be reunited. Instead, it describes how two different groups would become united.

Who is Gog of Magog?

Scriptures
Ezek. 38:2, 10-13

The Watchtower
May 15, 2015, pp. 29-30

Pure Worship
Chap. 17, pars. 3-10

Previous understanding: Gog of Magog is a prophetic name that applies to Satan after he was ousted from the heavens.

Clarification: Gog of Magog refers to a coalition of earthly nations that will attack pure worshippers during the great tribulation.

Reasoning behind the change: The prophetic descriptions of Gog—namely, that he is given as food to birds of prey and given a burial place on earth—suggest that Gog is not a spirit creature. In addition, the attack by Gog parallels what the books of Daniel and Revelation say about the attack by earthly nations on God's people.—Dan. 11:40, 44, 45; Rev. 17:14; 19:19.

Did Ezekiel see and tour the great spiritual temple that the apostle Paul later explained?

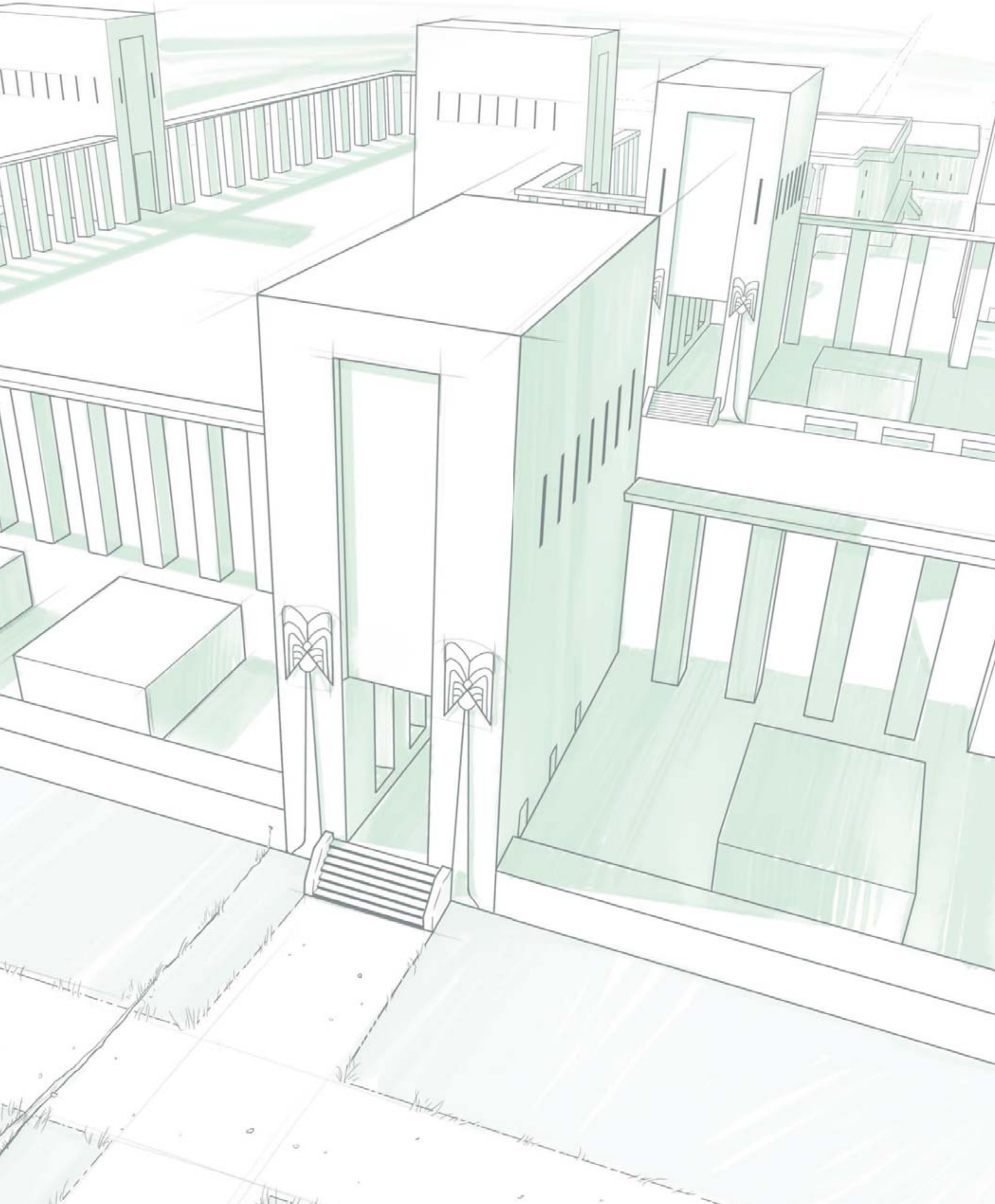
Scriptures
Ezek. 40:1-5

Pure Worship
Chaps. 13 and 14

Previous understanding: Ezekiel's visionary temple is the same as the spiritual temple that the apostle Paul explained.

Clarification: Ezekiel saw, not the spiritual temple that came into existence in 29 C.E., but an idealized vision of how the pure worship outlined in the Mosaic Law would be restored after the exile. Paul's inspired explanation of the spiritual temple focuses on the work that Jesus, as the Greater High Priest, accomplished from 29 to 33 C.E. Ezekiel's temple vision, which never mentions the high priest, focuses on the spiritual restoration that began in 1919 C.E. We therefore do not look for antitypical meanings in all the detailed features and measurements of Ezekiel's visionary temple. Rather, we ought to focus primarily on the lessons that Ezekiel's vision teaches about Jehovah's standards for pure worship.

Reasoning behind the change: Ezekiel's visionary temple differs from the spiritual temple in important ways. For instance, Ezekiel's temple featured many animal sacrifices; at the spiritual temple, only one sacrifice is offered, "once for all time." (Heb. 9:11, 12) In the centuries before Christ came, it was not yet Jehovah's time to reveal deep truths about the spiritual temple.



> “I will certainly sanctify my
> great name, . . . and the nations
> will have to know that
> I am Jehovah.”
>
> **EZEKIEL 36:23**

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